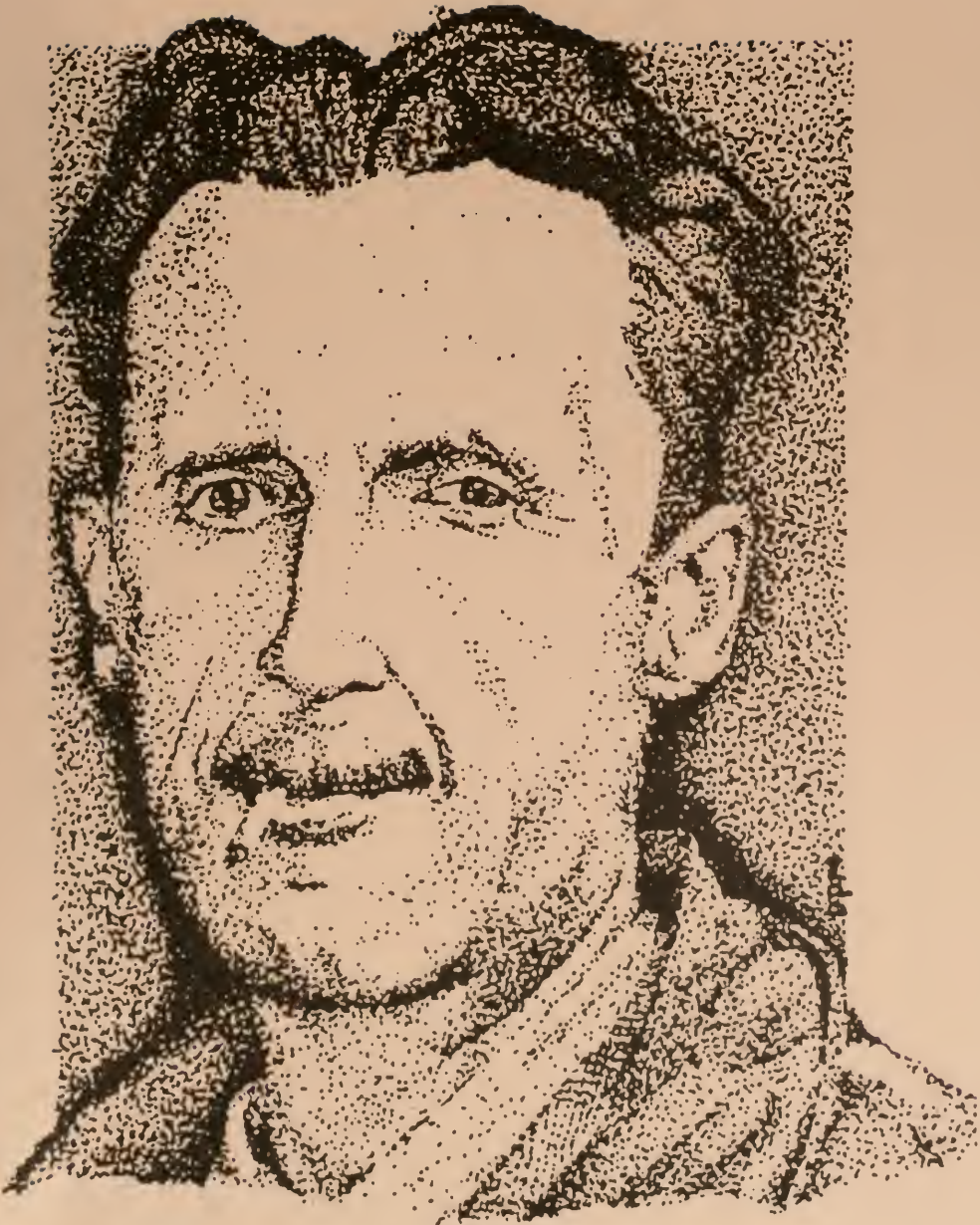



# *Four* ●●○○ *Quarters*

VOL. 4, NO. 2  
Second Series

FALL, 1990  
Four Dollars







# Four Quarters

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VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2, SECOND SERIES

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FALL, 1990

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## Quarter Notes

JOHN J. ROONEY

### *Reel Lessons Are For Life*

Growing up during the Depression, in a section of North Philadelphia inelegantly known as Swampoodle, I was torn between two rich Temples of Learning. One, The School, taught things that were good for us; things we ought to know; things that, as the bar-room philosopher Mr. Dooley put it, "are good preparation for the dull and boring jobs the world is full of." The other, The Movies, enticed us with the notion that life could be exciting, mysterious, adventurous, and yes, even romantic.

Saturday afternoons were the high point of my week. Like every red-blooded American boy who lived within walking distance of a movie house and could scrape up a dime, I rushed eagerly to see my larger-than-life heroes: Hoot Gibson, Tim Tyler, Buck Rogers, and Dick Tracy. Reel after reel of cowpunchers, gunslingers, explorers, and adventurers presented tough, clear-cut models for us to emulate.

The transition from childhood to adolescence was accompanied by a change in movie-going habits, as I searched for an identity to match my newly-emerging state. Why not a juvenile version of one of Hollywood's leading men? Gary Cooper, Jimmy Stewart, Tyrone Power, Clark Gable all gave me lessons in how to impress the female of the species, a creature I had

seen mainly at a distance in sexually segregated schools.

The first test of my potential as a romantic lead came with an invitation to a party, hosted by Allison. She combined the looks of Hedy Lamarr with the demure sweetness of Deanna Durbin. Whenever I saw her, I could sense my heart thumping; speech seemed to desert me.

The party began slowly with some preliminary milling around. Then one of the girls announced that we were going to play Post Office. My first few encounters in kitchen-doubling as-Post Office were with gawky, unappealing maidens who either turned a cheek or stretched their neck forward and gave a brief peck on the lips. Then I happened to call Allison's number. As she glided toward me alight from an inner glow, I felt transformed. Just to be close to her and kiss her tenderly on the cheek, would convey my feelings of respect and admiration. Her blue eyes mesmerized me as she approached, and in a sultry voice I had never heard, whispered, "Well, hello there!" I countered with...."Hi!"

I was quickly locked in an embrace which began as a soft and affectionate one and gradually built in power and passion. I finally broke away, thrilled but confused and puzzled. Why was I the beneficiary of this unexpected largesse? Did she discern something special in me? Suddenly, the answer came to me. No, It was the movies! She had seen some great love scenes and I was merely serving as a stand-in for her to rehearse with.





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Still, I decided I would ask her out for my first movie date.

As I waited for my chance the string of male admirers constantly attending to her became increasingly irritating to me. I particularly detested Valentine O'Hara who looked like Freddie Bartholomew in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as he fawned over her the whole time. Finally, I managed to get her alone and popped the question. "I'll have to ask my mother," came the reply in a sing-song cadence as she disappeared into the front part of the house.

In a few minutes, she reappeared. "My mother says I'm too young...to go to a movie with a boy." I knew better. It was my Z-striped sport coat with the padded shoulders and the Brylcreem I used to slick down my hair. Any mother would see me as some kind of monster. Allison skipped happily back to her coterie of admirers.

Undaunted, I demonstrated my equanimity in the face of this rebuff by curling up in a corner chair and puffing out mournful tunes on my trusty harmonica for the remainder of the evening. Next Saturday night I'd find a good horror movie.

Rather than serving as understudies to romantic leads, my friends and I began to suspect that we would soon become bit players in the scenario unfolding in Europe. While Charlie Chaplin was cavorting on the screen in *The Great Dictator*, his real life counterpart was the heavy in this grand drama, adventure, and horror show. The rumblings of war

threatened to add a new dimension to the normal demands made on the teenage male animal to prove his toughness, and the scale would be far larger than city streets, parks and playgrounds.

How could we get ready in just a few short years to meet this test? Lew Ayres, in *All Quiet on the Western Front* had earlier reinforced our instinctive tendency toward self-preservation and made us confirmed pacifists. Now a spate of movies emphasizing courage, heroism, and bravery, poured forth from the Dream Factories of Hollywood and Great Britain: *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, *Gunga Din*, *Beau Geste*, and *The Lost Patrol*.

We got caught up in the spirit and camaraderie of it all, masking our underlying insecurity beneath a veneer of bravado. We punctuated our homeward walk after the films with reenactments of Errol Flynn duels and defenses of Fort Zinderneuf.

After Pearl Harbor, our fears and expectations were confirmed. As the months marched by and the draft age was lowered from 21 to 18, most of my friends were soon in the uniform of Army, Navy or Marines. I am not sure how I, who had never been in an airplane and had a terror of heights, ended up in navy flight training. Perhaps *Dive Bomber* with Errol Flynn and *I Wanted Wings* with Veronica Lake and air cadets Wayne Morris, William Holden and Ray Milland had their effect.



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As we bounced around from base to base, from Flight Prep to Pre-Flight, to Primary Flight, Intermediate Flight and on and on, I made every effort to keep up with movies.

At the Navy base known as Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, most of us went to the nearest movie for our Saturday night liberty, although we were forced to leave in the middle of the show to beat the curfew. We also resented the management for an admission policy which showed a lack of sensitivity to our status. In large black and white lettering at the box office window for all to see, it blared out at us:

Adults—\$1.00

Service Men—Free

F & M Cadets—.50

Children—.50

Still we went.

Finally, following a long period of preparation, we were ready to face the Yellow Peril—the Stearman biplane. This bright yellow monster that we flew over the wind-swept fields of Indiana could perform every maneuver in the book while in the air. Once it touched the ground it was liable to groundloop or, if your feet lacked the right touch on the brakes, flip over on its back. Check pilots were also waiting to wash out any fledgling pilot who lacked the precision demanded during check flights. Occasional rainy days were our only salva-

tion. Even today, whenever I wake to the sound of heavy rain beating on the roof, a peaceful calm comes over me, and I get the urge to see a movie. For at that time a rainy day not only meant a surcease from the tension of the training regimen, but also seeing an instructional film. Now I shall digress to remind the reader that in WWII, there were the allies, and there was the enemy. Without going into the complete line-up, it will suffice to mention that *our* main enemy was the Army Air Corps. Admittedly, they had topped us with their acquisition from Tin Pan Alley: “Off we go into the wild blue yonder,” which had a clear edge over “Sky-anchors a...way! We’re sail...ors of the air... We’re sail...ing every...where...” But when Hollywood went to war, we got the best of them. Sure the Army Air Corps had Ronald Reagan for their training films, but we got Hollywood’s Huntz Hall. This refugee from the Dead End Kids, with his East-side accent, was typecast for the part of Dilbert, a name honored in Naval Annals, much as the Army remembers the Sad Sack. In a fraction of a second he could switch from the nonchalant confidence of a flying Ace to the panic-stricken confusion of a cadet in a tailspin. In such classic vignettes, as *Never Mistake Your Instructor for a Tow Target*, we were indoctrinated into the hazards of being careless, or impulsive, or overcautious, or too daring, or momentarily distracted, or any of dozens of deadly sins that send he who commits them to an early hell—and destroys expensive government property in the process. Huntz Hall and his alter ego, Dilbert, accompanied us to Pensacola and con-



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tinued to bolster our confidence; for whatever mistakes we made during flight training, at least none of us was a "Dilbert".

Much as I admired Huntz Hall, I'm glad it was Reagan who got to be president. Like most Americans, I disagreed with many of his policies, but he made us feel good about ourselves. Thanks to Reagan I'm no longer haunted by the feeling that a life spent in the movies was a wasted one. In fact, if George Bush wants to call in an advisor who is in synch with his predecessor, I'll step up and volunteer. For when faced with tough decisions Ronald Reagan and I both ask the same question: What would John Wayne do? or Gregory Peck?

And with the advent of the VCR, I'm taking a continual refresher course from my favorite tutors. They are captured for me on Million Dollar Movie or Night Life Theater for subsequent review. The sound of a VCR in the middle of the night is as peaceful as a summer rainfall. I sleep a contented sleep. And I dream the dreams of my youth.

Quarterback Tom Brown has been injured with our team trailing Notre Dame by three points with just ten seconds to go. I'm warming up on the sidelines, tossing a ball to Jack Oakie wearing his plus fours and heavy blue cardigan with gold college letter. His round smiling face beams as he says "you can do it, Kid." Cheerleaders Judy Garland, Betty Grable, and one who looks like Betty Boop, in white sweaters and scarlet letters to match their miniskirts,

stop their frenzied gyrations to stare up at a yellow biplane wobbling in low over the stadium like a wounded duck. I recognize Huntz Hall flying upside down and towing a huge sign that proclaims, "DON'T BE A DILBERT!" Coach William Demarest shouts gruffly, "WELL, ARE YA JES GONNA STAN' DERE OR YA GONNA GET IN DA GAY-EM. I rush in, throw a quick pass to Joe E. Brown who's wearing his baseball uniform from *Elmer The Great*. He grabs it and slides across the goal line shouting, YOW-WEEEEEEEEEE!

Mounted police, directed by Nelson Eddy, resplendent in his Royal Canadian Mounted Police uniform, try to hold back the crowd. I duck under the stands looking for a place to get a Moxie, my favorite chocolate drink. Chico Marx appears wearing his cone-shaped hat and pushing his cart. "Hey Boss, you wanna buy some Tootsie Frootsie ice-a-cream?" I brush by and come to a deserted section of the stands. Peter Lorre and Sidney Greenstreet are manhandling Woody Allen and asking menacingly about a Maltese Falcon. "Look, fellas, this is all a big mistake," he pleads. "Believe me, you want Humphrey Bogart, not me!"

I decide not to intervene and hurry on. Outside the stadium I come upon two boys rolling on the ground fighting. Mickey Rooney, in his plaid lumberjacket, is giving the boy in the sailor suit a good thrashing. I smile as I recognize Freddie Bartholomew (or is it Valentine O'Hara?). Much farther on I come to fog-shrouded Waterloo Bridge. I start across half expecting to see Vivian Leigh leaning seductively against





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the railing. Instead, a pink glow appears and Allison dances toward me with a radiant smile and an incandescent glow. "Why didn't you call me," she whispers. We embrace tenderly—in a scene acceptable to the Legion of Decency—and stroll off hand-in-hand into the night to the music of Borrah Minevitch and his Harmonica Rascals.

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JUDY TRACHTENBERG

### *The Stranger*

Furness Junior High School in South Philly and Ardmore Junior High on the Main Line must have shared the same planet. But when I transferred from the former to the latter in the middle of eighth grade, I had my doubts. It took about a half hour in the new school to figure out that this switch was going to involve a lot more than a change of venue.

"Would you like to see my house?" the girl with the blond hair and turned-up nose asked me as we sat in Miss Hovey's home room class.

Surprised but pleased that an invitation was so forthcoming, I said yes. Then she put the current issue of *House & Garden* on my desk.

"Here it is," she said, turning to HG's equivalent of a centerfold. "My house."

"Where are you from?" another girl with blond hair and turned-up nose asked.

"South Philly."

"Oh. Isn't that the slums?"

Thus fared my maiden voyage into the Land of Snow White.

Although a public school, Ardmore celebrated chapel every Tuesday morning. The choir, wearing somber black robes, the girls mostly resembling the two in my homeroom, I always felt, that year, like a junior anthropologist, observing a species other than my own. I also knew that I would give anything to be part of that strange and wonderful culture.

The period was spent singing religious songs, but not ones from every denomination. I loved them all, especially "Onward Christian Soldiers," and sang them with gusto. But when we did "Come All Ye Faithful," I drew the line at Chri-i-st, our Lord and became an instant revisionist, substituting Chri-i-st, *your* Lord. I don't think this was done out of any religious fervor, but, perhaps out of perversity, to corroborate my differentness.

High grades at Furness Jr. High placed me in the accelerated class at Ardmore. Accelerated there had no resemblance to accelerated here. Besides algebra, which sounded vaguely familiar, the math class was learning how to keep a checkbook. In my former life only merchants needed to deal with checkbooks. My father had one, as did



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other businessmen on Seventh Street, where we lived above our store. So I assumed that I was mistakenly placed in a class for budding businessmen.

"I think I'm in the wrong class," I told Miss Baum, my prim, diminutive math teacher.

"Can't you do the work?"

"Well, yes, but I'm not interested in business."

Her puzzled look interrupted by a Van Johnson look-alike, I was able to leave, dignity and confusion both intact.

"Why don't you bring some friends home after school?" my parents wanted to know. How could I explain to them that none of us was ready for this step. Although in the ethnic potpourri of my former school I probably didn't stand out more than any of the Seven Dwarfs did from one another, here I was Alien in Wonderland. This radical change in perspective disturbed my equilibrium and I needed time to regain my not-so-strong sense of self. My identity, like the colored glass in a kaleidoscope, shifted with the viewer. Who was the real me and where did I belong?

Even lunch was a reminder that I was an outsider peeking in. The few of us who didn't look like Doris Day sat together; food was the biggest reminder of my status as pariah. I was the only one in school with pastrami on rye. To assimilate I would have had to sacrifice this one pleasure for ham or bologna on white bread--with butter--and even

doing so would have offered no guarantee of my joining the club. Whether on principle or because rye is better than white, I gambled, keeping what seemed the one constant in my life--the same lunch I had always eaten.

I didn't have the same investment in clothes that I had in rye bread. So when one of my lunch-mates mentioned awkwardly that my color-coordinated anklets looked funny, especially with oxfords, I was happy to conform. My unlikely fairy godmother suggested loafers or saddles--the slippers that would gain my entrance into this enchanted world. Get my foot in the door, so to speak.

That Saturday my mother took me to Ettinger's shoe store on Lancaster Avenue to buy me the right look. Thick white socks, cuffed three inches above the ankle, slipped comfortably into the new loafers, where I joyfully placed a new penny in each slot. I reveled in my new look, never realizing that it would take more than donning new shoes to turn me into Cinderella.

"Do you want to go to the boy-girl party Saturday night?" Janey Barnes, a classmate, asked me in school the day I first wore those new slippers.

Crazed, but happy for recognition, I answered, "Sure, but who would I go with?"

"Don't worry, we'll figure something out." She was casual; I was numb.



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On the Night of Terror I completely discarded my old chrysalis and put on my brand new one: a cardigan sweater with the buttons in back, a dickey, a string of pearls, and a stitched-down pleated skirt. We were to meet in the lobby of the Surburban Theatre in Ardmore and await further instructions. I was a prisoner-of-war waiting to hear which form my punishment would take. Unfortunately, desertion was not among my options, as disapproval could be no less painful than court-martial.

A group of Janey's and Vans came in with the only other non-Wasp in the class--Soo Yung (Sonny), and it was then that I saw my life passing before me. Sonny's parents and mine would arrange an early marriage. Love wasn't important; values and traditions were. We both valued fitting in and shared the tradition of not fitting in. As the only two ethnics on the Main Line, or so it seemed, our experience had to be more similar to each other's than to those of the prevailing culture. And there was a precedent for a Chinese-Jewish connection; everyone knew that won tons were Chinese kreplachs.

"You know each other, don't you?" Janey asked as she kind of introduced us. "We thought maybe you'd like to sit together at the movie."

With the stoicism of our collective people, we did sit together, then danced together--as was expected--at Janey's party. Shy and awkward, we didn't speak to each other the entire evening, mimes playing our given roles, longing for the play to be over.

As the months passed I also started to pass, with only occasional reminders of my now quasi-outsider status.

"Do you celebrate Thanksgiving?"

"Uh-huh."

"How about New Year's?"

Christmas they never asked about. That everyone celebrated this one was a given.

Then in ninth grade my life changed dramatically. A real exotic came to our school. Paula. Her black curly hair, olive skin and full features made me look all-American. While Lois's and Janey's ancestors were cruising on the Mayflower, Paula's were doing less glamorous things. I exulted in losing my title to her and wouldn't ask for a rematch, especially since at the next party Paula was fixed up with Sonny.

I had been swept abruptly into the world that peopled the Dick and Jane books of my childhood. The characters, to me, were as much fairy tale figures as those in the Brothers Grimm. The challenge of that year, much like the challenge to the mythical hero to prove himself worthy, prepared me well for life's odyssey. But whenever I catch an old Doris Day movie, I'm always thrown back to that one brief moment when I was the only one who didn't look like her.







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FRAN O'BYRNE PELHAM

### *Imani*

Thick bushy bayberries and pine dot the edge of the cove where two figures splash in the glassy bay. A teenager, arms tanned and strong, lifts a small child high in the air. They are a picture, the two of them: the sun glints gold on my daughter's cascading hair as she raises before her the little girl with black wiry curls. Their soft, easy laughter ripples in the warm August breeze. A thousand diamonds shimmer and sparkle on the surface of the water around the pair in the late afternoon. Imani, a black child from Queens, New York, has just enjoyed her first dip in seashore waters with my daughter Mary. For the next two weeks the possessions, rooms, and hearts of my family will be open to Imani, the child we are sponsoring from The Fresh Air Fund at St Francis Parish, Long Beach Island, New Jersey.

A small ad in our church newspaper caught my eye one Sunday in early Spring. Families in the parish were asked to consider giving a vacation to a child who had never before felt a warm ocean breeze brush her cheek. My husband Don and I agreed it would be rewarding for our family and for the child.

We were not mistaken. A day never slipped by without our seeing the immense love in Imani's heart. For two weeks we laughed at her questions and enjoyed her spontaneity. We also discovered that

she possessed a wisdom and maturity far beyond her seven years.

The morning Imani accompanied me to the tennis court is unforgettably etched in my mind, for the experience introduced me to the way this child perceived the world. A friend had invited me to play a doubles match, and I decided to bring along Imani and another child from our neighborhood. I packed a few treats and cold drinks and drove to the tennis courts. Once there, I sat the children under a large green umbrella next to the court and spread a few magazines and Chinese Jacks on the table before them.

When I walked off the court 45 minutes later, Imani met me at the gate. "Where were you, Frannie?" she scolded. "I looked through the fence to see you play, but I couldn't pick you out from the others. How come you all look alike?"

I pondered the significance of her remark. Did we, the people in my community, all truly look alike to this child? Before I could answer, Imani had solved the problem: "Why don't you sew your name on your shirt, so people will know who you are? And by the way, Frannie, why do you wear everything white when you play tennis?" "Oh, because of the sun," I said. Without missing a beat, her brow shot up, her cupid-lips pursed, and she said, "The sun don't know color, Frannie."

The matter of color was an idea Imani returned to often. One evening, after she had bathed and put on her





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pajamas, Imani jumped up onto my bed to give me a goodnight kiss. As she investigated everything in the room with interest, her eyes fixed upon a picture above the nightstand. A silhouette cut out in black paper, the profiles of my husband and me hung from a pewter hook. Imani stared at the picture, her eyes widening. "Frannie," she said, "is that you?" "Yes," I said.

"Then why do you look so black?" she asked, astonished.

A trip to the beach with Imani was like uncorking a bottle of champagne. Meeting the ocean for the first time, Imani befriended it. Tripping into the surf, knees and hands sinking into the wet sand, she headed straight for the horizon. The lifeguard's whistle held no meaning for her. With my heart in my throat, I coaxed her back to shallow water. Rolling and giggling in the surf, she asked, "Is this ocean here all the time?" And later when she stood up to walk out of the water: "Frannie, why is the ground moving under me.?"

My son Michael, 13, was hoping for a boy when I told him about the child who would live with our family during the summer. But he developed, in his own way, a certain awe for Imani following an excursion to a festival held by the Franciscan friars on Long Beach Island. "Let's go on my favorite ride," Michael suggested, a glimmer of mischief in his blue eyes, as he led Imani to the Octopus. Three rides later, Michael left his beloved Octopus. "Where's Imani?" I asked. "She's still on the dumb thing. I can't get her off. She

loves it." Imani rode the Octopus eight times that night.

Later, we sat around the kitchen counter cracking open the crabs Imani and Michael had caught earlier. I could tell Imani wanted to get things straight this night. Her eyes ticked off an inventory of the room. "Does that picture on the wall stay there all the time? Do these chairs and tables stay here all the time?" "Yes," I said. "But you don't live here in the winter?" "Right," I said. "We call this house a vacation house." Just then, our miniature poodle trotted through the kitchen past Imani. "That your vacation dog?" she earnestly wanted to know.

The evening before Imani left, she asked me for a pair of scissors. Rummaging through my bureau, I found a small pair and handed them to her. Standing on tip toe, she quickly snipped a lock of my blonde hair. Later I realized the touching significance of this act. In my dresser that same night I discovered a plastic baggie. Inside, tiny black ringlets lay in a soft heap. She had left me a warm reminder of the friendship we shared for two weeks.

Finally the day arrived when Imani was to leave us and return to Queens. Wrapping her arms tightly around me, Imani sprinkled my face and neck with tiny kisses. She dropped her head onto my shoulder, then whispered, "I'll miss you, Frannie, and you'll miss me even more."





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CARY HOLLADAY

### *Russia: What the News Broadcasts Don't Tell You*

In concentrating on the Soviet food queues, our news correspondents overlook much that is worth reporting. On a recent visit to the USSR, I found stories everywhere.

First impressions: in Moscow nobody cuts the grass; it's knee high in weeds and dead dandelions. Russian cats are too thin, except for one sleek tabby at a monastery. At restaurants, waiters try to sell you jars of caviar from the kitchen, pocketing the money. The glasses on the table are chipped, so mind your lips. Moscow's air pollution gags you, but there's the intriguing scent of strong European cigarettes. It's wonderful the way the Russians roll their r's, as in *roubles*. Their nasal voices sound like balalaikas.

Speaking of roubles, the black market is intoxicating. A Russian friend told me you can get anything on it, even a car. Everybody's on the take, he said, stealing from the workplace and selling the goods on the side. The average salary, 240 roubles a month, equals only \$40.00 on the official exchange. For this reason, U.S. dollars go far. A bottle of Pepsi costs about three cents.

My Russian friend took me to a local bazaar, "the Exhibition," a crowded mile of wonderful artwork, music, and food. Few tourists know about it. The artists

had internationally long hair and an intensity in their somber blue eyes. I bought two oil paintings. The artist traced the price on his palm. Since I was paying in dollars, my friend told me, we had to be careful about being watched.

"KGB are everywhere. They could take the pictures and the money away from you," said my friend, and I believed him, but nothing happened.

Moscow stretches for miles, its nine million people crowded into huge shabby apartment buildings with sagging balconies. Some of my American companions disliked the Russians, saying, "They push and shove, they don't say please and thank you." Soldiers abound, their scarlet-trimmed olive uniforms giving a borrowed effect, not fully tailored to fit the wearers. They watched us with level stares.

The Soviets throw off their reserve when they dance. At restaurants, they chant for vodka and dance on the tables. Often they are kind. Boarding a train, I tried to buy strawberries from a couple who had a huge basketful. They would not sell any, yet moments later, they invited me into their compartment and gave me a plateful. They were husband and wife, both dentists. They spoke no English, I no Russian, but somehow we talked.

Strawberries were a treat. Russian food is heavy, with a standard fare of fatty meat, canned peas, and cold fish. Forget about fresh foods. The bread and butter are tasty, and the coffee and teas



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are wonderful, served in huge silver pots. Russians eat lots of ice cream, always vanilla, a heavy, unpasteurized concoction a bit sour to a Western tongue. Bottles of bitterly fizzy lemonade were served at lunch and dinner. Breakfast brought surprises—a slice of good cheese, hard-boiled eggs, incongruous cold hot dogs.

I asked my Russian friend if we might visit a tattoo parlor. Taken aback, he said, "You can only get tattoos in prison." I asked to see the Loubianka prison. My friend was horrified. We didn't go.

I did visit a Moscow cemetery. Plots were well tended, many with flowers. Black and white photos of the deceased gazed from modest markers. From the bell tower of the church, crows shouted.

Crows were everywhere. Two hours from Moscow lies the village of Suzdal, centuries old and built entirely of wood. Visitors tour the sturdy rustic houses and drink thick golden dandelion wine. At dusk the vast medieval silence is broken only by the crows' caws.

If Moscow has a rundown, seductive charm, Leningrad has an air of triumph. Having survived the siege of 1941-43, which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, the city still grieves. People are preoccupied, remembering. The city's beauty and sophistication catch at your heart. With canals, statues, and palaces, it's far more cosmopolitan than grumpy, unkempt Moscow.

Beware: Leningrad's water contains a virus to which residents are immune, but which brings visitors to their knees. Forewarned, my group drank only bottled water (the hotel gouged us at \$4.50 a liter). Some of my companions refused even to bathe. My bathwater was dark as beer.

The third city on the tour was Kiev, capital of the Ukraine. "You won't see any children here," the guide said. "School's out, and they've been sent to summer camp." There wasn't a child to be seen, except a group of urchins who gave our bus "the finger." Had the children been sent away to escape the radiation from Chernobyl?

How much of what the guide said was true? She was educated and patrician, yet she praised hypnotists. Such people are very important, she said. A good hypnotist will make your scars disappear. The guide's brother had had white hair; a hypnotist made it turn brown again. I thought of Rasputin's compelling eyes and of the revered illusions and charlatany I saw at the Moscow circus, with its quick-change artists and dancing bears. A friend said, "This seems like a place where legend would spread fast." Magic runs deep in Soviet culture.

The guide bridged culture gaps when she spoke of the mother-in-law problem. In cities, living quarters are so scarce that families commonly live with in-laws, causing endless quarrels and spawning many jokes. Divorces are easy to get.





## Quarter Notes

Everywhere, people were surprisingly well-dressed, perhaps a result of the black market. Shoe repair shops are common. A store in Kiev offered flimsy fashions. You could pull one thread and undress the mannequin. The Kiev food market proved that the Ukraine is still the nation's breadbasket, with rhubarb, onions, radishes, and greens for sale.

My group endured two domestic flights on Aeroflot. Diesel fumes overwhelmed us, making us giddy. We were served bowls of smelly mineral water. Part of the floor beneath my seat came apart. Landings were so rough they left us reeling.

What metaphors did I find for the Soviets? In a deserted playground behind a school, metal steps climbed to nowhere. Perhaps they were once connected to something fun and functional, like a slide or monkey bars. And on a big cooperative farm, I saw a horse in the middle of a field, a big brown horse. I saw mile after mile of farmland with no people and no machinery, and little land plowed even though it was spring. There stood the horse, without direction or work to do. It was beautiful and strong, but all it did was stand there.

○○○○

JOSEPH MEREDITH

### *The Teacher*

*for RSM*

Risking harm at class's end, your feet  
Inching carefully to the floor, you gather  
Text and folders, your tiny cane  
Aiding your steps, and amble, smiling, out.

Small wonder, how does your child-sized body  
Put up with the pain when the angry joints—  
Ankle and knee, pelvis and spine—  
Rasp against the crying ganglia,  
Rebel in force against the slightest flexing?  
Our petty aches must mightily bore you,  
Who carry from the womb your brittle legacy.

Make us, through your courage, see the truth:  
Awful pain can bring us wisdom if,  
Like a child, we take delight in laughter;  
Like a woman, we endure, endure, endure.



JOHN RODDEN

## Literary Studies and The Repression of Reputation

“Who makes or breaks a writer’s reputation?” asked *Esquire* during the mid-1960s. The editors’ answer, titled “The Structure of the Literary Establishment,” came in the form of a multicolored “chart of power.” The chart named names. Included was “virtually everyone of serious literary consequence,” whether “writer, editor, agent or simple hipster.” The center of power was indicated, noted the editors, by “the hot red blob in the middle,” which oozed over the names of the chief literary makers and breakers.

In 1977 *Esquire* drove to the heart of the blob, asking a long list of “knowledgeable” writers, academic critics, and journalists the question, “Which American writers do you consider the most over- and underrated?” Running below the responses across four pages was a sketch of Father Time, busily at work inflating and bursting bubbles bearing the images of various candidates. No consensus was sought, though Dreiser and Willa Cather fared well, and Pound, Eliot, Hemingway, Mailer, and Edmund Wilson less well. The editors acknowledged that their respondents generously volunteered a number of non-Americans too (and stretched “writers of this century” back to the Venerable Bede), “proving that once you get started on this kind of thing, it’s hard to know where to stop.”

Unfortunately, reflection on the matter seems to stop at the doorstep of literary studies. “Reputation” is one of those subjects that readers, critics, and scholars love to talk about, but to which serious attention is rarely paid, even by sociologists of literature—and not at all by literary critics. Separate disciplines are devoted to the study of wealth and power, yet none to honor or reputation, the third chief category of class systems and human motivation. A few cultural critics have drawn attention to the ways in which the institutions of literary criticism—book publishing, book reviewing, intellectual journalism—have exerted influence on public literary taste or within the literary academy. But their work has typically castigated the middlebrow “culture industry,” rather than addressed the making of authors’ and books’ reputations. Although reading lists for college English courses and even whole libraries testify to the exalted reputations of a few canonized authors, a near-total silence has prevailed in the academy on reputation as a literary issue in its own right.

That such a central dynamic of literary life—in a sense *the* defining, controlling category for an essentially honorific activity like literature and literary criticism—should go virtually ignored by critics of literature might seem at first glance a professional conspiracy by *Esquire*’s “blob.” Yet the academy’s inattention to reputation is hardly due to outright professional collusion. It is, rather, a joint matter of institutional, linguistic and historical

contingencies. These have generated and accommodated the two key repressive factors, namely the academy's preoccupation with literary interpretation and its persistent habit of averting its eyes from its own institutional history. The essence of the problem has been our unreflective tendency to assume that what is *valued* is invariably what is also *reputed*.

What's in a name? Few observers would deny that authors' reputations bear heavily on practices in publishing and literary journalism. Yet, on those rare occasions when journals like *The American Scholar* have taken up literary reputation as an issue, they have politely asked only the first of *Esquire's* buried questions (about underrated books and authors), characterizing their discussion as "the game" of rediscovering "neglected books."

Indeed the topic may well strike a bit too close to home, as observers as opposed in their literary politics as Norman Podhoretz and Richard Kostelanetz seem to agree. For elite institutions and star reputations exist in academe and in the literary industry just as in other spheres of activity. To study reputation, then, invariably risks reputations: we may conclude to the subject's disadvantage that public esteem is grossly at variance either with his or her "substantive achievement" or with informed private judgment. Reputation typically makes for more reputation and vice versa (a.k.a the Matthew Effect), in many cases irrespective of merit. For instance, speaking of his journal's "star system," editor W.J.T. Mitchell of *Critical Inquiry*, one of the "best-reputed" literary-academic journals, concedes: "We sometimes print essays by famous writers which do not come up to our normal standards" in order to "interest those in other specialities" and because "one of our goals is to give the readers a sense of what recognized writers are up to...even when we do not think that they are up to much good." Mitchell seems strangely unaware that *Critical Inquiry*—which proudly advertises itself, quoting a *Times Literary Supplement* comment, as "'consistently the best of the academic journals'—NEED WE SAY MORE? SUBSCRIBE TODAY"—makes writers "recognized." And that, short of a disclaimer identifying those journals which aren't up to much good, an *appearance* in "the best academic journal" virtually by itself legitimates an author's work as "of interest" to the general academic-intellectual community.

Professional reluctance to self-reflect upon how the literary industry and academy help to build and maintain reputations is therefore strongly motivated. Viking Press was more than slightly embarrassed upon learning in the late 1970s that a book it had rejected as "inferior" was none other than a typed copy of a novel it had already published which had sold more than 400,000 copies and won the 1969 National Book Award. The novel was Jerzy Kosinski's *Steps*, submitted (as an experiment) by a young author. (Fourteen other publishers and fifteen agents also rejected the retyped *Steps*.)

The so-called Doris Lessing Hoax was the same test, only conducted by the author herself. Under the pseudonym "Jane Somers," Lessing published two novels in 1983 and 1984, which earned her few and poor reviews. "I wanted to be reviewed on merit, as a new writer, without benefit of a 'name,'" she later explained. She discovered, however, as had Anthony Trollope a century earlier

after engaging in a similar venture in mid-career, that "merit" often counts for less than existing reputation toward the continued success of an established writer's books. (The reviews for "Lessing"'s novels were noticeably warmer the second time around.)

Indeed, the absence of an existing reputation—usually via a well-known institution—typically results in literary stillbirth. One report from 1982 claims that Viking published only one unsolicited fiction manuscript out of 135,00 submissions during the previous three decades. (Random House's score was one out of 60,000.) And yet, a book published privately or by a small press typically goes unreviewed and little-noticed. Numerous critics have drawn attention to the canonical authority of *The New York Times Book Review* and *The New York Review of Books*, and in particular to the high correlation between advertising space and review space in their pages.

Nowhere is the Matthew Effect better illustrated than in the academy. Two young psychology professors did not endear themselves to their senior colleagues when, in a 1982 article in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, they exposed the dominant role which recognized names and prestigious institutions play in academic peer review practices. Similar to the experiment with Kosinski's *Steps*, they retyped and resubmitted 12 articles which had appeared in 12 leading psychology journals, changing only the authors' names and institutional affiliations. Eight articles were rejected, three were recognized as resubmissions, and one was accepted.

The example raises the large, vague issue of how universities acquire reputations. Quoting faculty comments on the academy's hiring practices and emphasis of scholarship over teaching, Richard Ohmann has argued in *English in America* that "quality" is often sacrificed to "reputation" in that a "major" department's self-image and future are typically determined by national rankings based on "the subjective perceptions of the department's reputation by those...who can know little or nothing of the department's quality." Such perceptions, what Ohmann calls "the myths of prestige," easily become regarded as self-evident facts. (Half of *Esquire's* "makers and breakers" in the literary Establishment of the mid-1960s were drawn from four institutions.) To question literary repute is therefore to question perceptions: and to admit that perceptions are conditional and perspectival is to grant that other than the prevailing view is not only possible but possibly more valid.

It is therefore ironic, if perhaps predictable, that the motive force for the official disparagement of reputation as a subject of literary studies came partly from the modern literary academy's urge to secure a better reputation for itself. The early postwar idea was to model literary criticism on the sciences (with literature its laboratory object of study) and to settle on a set of masterpieces (like chemistry's formalizing the periodic table) which would provide endogenous authority and disciplinary stability. Northrop Frye's landmark *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) vigorously expressed what was once (and in many quarters remains) the academy's prevailing view toward reputation. "All the literary chit-chat which makes the reputation of poets boom and crash in an imaginary stock exchange," declared Frye, bore no connection with "real criticism." Literary criticism was still "a primitive science," whose



"materials, the masterpieces of literature," could only yield their natural fruits and ground a "systematic" field of study if reputation and the history of taste ("where there are no facts and where all truths have been split into...half-truths") were "snipped off and thrown away." How the nascent science's materials—its masterpieces—gained their status, whether there might not be "half-truths" in the history of reputations pertinent to a systematic criticism, and how one could even speak about the comparative maturities of disciplines without some understanding of their institutional histories: these questions did not detain Frye.

Perhaps almost as much as covert anxiety or overt disciplinary hostility, however, the academy's neglect of reputation is explained by the language in and by which the history of criticism has inscribed traditional literary problems (especially taste, value, endurance and validity). Even as the postwar literary academy's preoccupation with interpretation was leading to what Barbara Herrnstein Smith has called the "exile of evaluation," and to the severe circumscription of these other long-established problems, what passing attention these problems did receive served to obscure and absorb the problem of reputation.

Thus, in their chapter entitled "Evaluation" in *Theory of Literature* (1949), the bible of postwar literary theorists, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren conflate endurance ("survival") with reputation and then make reputation a criterion for value. Their chapter reflects the common fallacy about the correspondence of reputation to value. The fallacy is traceable to the neoclassical debates on taste, in which Samuel Johnson and David Hume confusedly mixed words pertaining to reputation like "greatness," "approbation," "honor," "fame," "acclaim," "admiration," "approval," and "renown" with terms pertaining to evaluation, including "quality," "excellence," and "merit." Wellek and Warren write as if there exists a distributive "law of reputation" on the model of perfect economic competition, in which judges have access to all conceivably relevant information bearing on judgments and which work flawlessly to reward merit with due esteem. "The largest reputations," note the authors, "survive generational tastes: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton—even Dryden and Pope, Wordsworth and Tennyson—have a permanent though not fixed reputation."

But "permanent" repute is not explainable by the tautology that certain authors "survive generational tastes": such authors gain and maintain reputations at least partly because the literary academy institutionalizes a fixed *range* of reputations within which authors and works are more likely to endure, i.e., they become "major" authors. The practice of dividing authors into "major," "minor," and "ephemeral" has reinforced the idea of a single top tier of canonical literature, "The Great Tradition." Current academic and publishing practices virtually guarantee that a recognized major author will not fall into minor status, where, over time, oblivion threatens.

So discussion about literary reputation and canonized authors inevitably leads to discussion about the literary canon itself—and to currently "hot" academic topics like whether or not to "deconstruct" the Great Tradition of Western White Male writers—and add (or substitute) black, Third World, and



women authors. The issue of "canon-formation" has attracted recent attention, as in the much-publicized controversy over Stanford University's recent decision to change its traditional core curriculum of freshman literature, because it directly bears on an inescapable pedagogical task: required reading lists.

But canon-formation is usually approached narrowly, as if it involved the reputation of works alone, the "masterpieces." Yet genres, historical periods, national literatures, movements, and schools also possess reputations. And all of *their* reputations directly influence the reputations of works and authors, as well as one another. Moreover, the institutions of criticism and publishing (agents, publishing houses, journals, reviewers and review pages) also possess reputations which can weigh heavily in the reputations gained (or missed) by books and authors. The same observation holds for extra-literary phenomena (e.g., national prestige, language of composition, prevailing aesthetic theories). Each of them is a "canon" with its own history and dynamics. By tacit agreement, these canons too are often hierarchically scaled (into major and minor, or sometimes graded even more precisely).

The reputations of these categories and sub-categories by no means necessarily coincide: any of them may raise (or lower) and enlarge (or shrink) the reputations of each other or of member works. Consider the case of George Orwell. *1984*, with 20 million copies sold, certainly possesses a public reputation much wider than Orwell's. Along with *Animal Farm*, *1984* has undoubtedly extended, if not directly raised, the standing in which Orwell's journalism is regarded—indeed his journalism would probably never even have been republished (in more than 2,000 pages) if it had not been for the success of *Animal Farm* and *1984*. American champions like Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling exerted significant positive influence on Orwell's American reputation, as have master-critics like T. S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis on Donne's and D.H. Lawrence's, respectively. Some of Orwell's columns are arguably superior as journalism to his early novels as novels, but certainly none of them has received the critical attention of *Burmese Days* and *Coming Up For Air*.

Numerous other, easily overlooked categories of literary repute have also interacted to shape Orwell's status. That he wrote during the last years of the British Empire and in English, for example, has figured heavily, if imprecisely, in his reputation. Conor Cruise O'Brien has justly asked if Orwell's work, with its "Anglocentric world view," would have commanded nearly so attention during the years of Britain's decline as a world power in the 1960s and '70s. And surely Orwell would be less well known today to the international reading public, no matter how appealing his prose style, if he had written in Bulgarian, a language with no internationally-recognized literary tradition and whose linguistic community is without power or status. (One doubts that Bulgarian-born Elias Canetti, who chose to write in German, would have received the Nobel Prize if he had penned his work in Bulgarian, let alone his childhood tongue, Ladino.)

To speak of *the* canon, therefore, whether as a line of masterworks, or even as limited to literary works exclusively, serves the restrictive view that the traditional high canon of great books is the only canon. What about hitherto little-appreciated genres such as the episodic and the polemic? Why a single, unrevisable canon of poetry, novels and drama? Or of "major" authors?

The questions need asking, because books in "the" canon possess reputations contingent on numerous unexamined factors that have little to do with "literary merit." And the issue does not stop with the canon. Rarely does the critic or reviewer attend, even impressionistically (at least not in print), to how the institutional status of certain publishers, agents, universities, journals, and "esteemed" critics may figure in his or others' verdicts. Or to how the stature of prevailing aesthetic theories and literary movements influence his or others' criticism. Or to the significance of interpersonal networks of affiliations, mechanisms of literary promotion and celebrity, or to the prestige of a genre or national literature in her and others' evaluations.

And yet, however much these issues lie beyond what we consider the normal act of literary evaluation, they do not lie beyond reputation. Indeed they constitute, acknowledged or not, the *stuff* of reputations—of which "evaluation," in any pure or disinterested sense, forms only a part. Of course, all these numerous literary and extra-literary factors are impossible to measure precisely. Yet that these factors are almost invariably airbrushed out of the scene of criticism—as if "context-free" evaluations were possible or even desirable—testifies less to the formidable nature of the task than to the academy's collective repression of it.

Thus, to label suggestions to open up the canon "special interest politics" and to dismiss them accordingly, as many professors have done, is just another example of how the academy maintains the pretense of aesthetic purity as a moral high ground. Their posture merely acts to obscure the fact that all canons are political, and to veil the connections between the politics of literary reputation and politics of the literary academy and publishing industry.

For the notion that the high canon contains "the best that has been thought and said" begs the crucial questions: thought and said by, for, and to whom? when and where? for what immediate tasks? to what larger ends? under what conditions? Thus when J. Hillis Miller expresses his support for the "established canon" on the grounds that "it is more important to read Spenser, Shakespeare or Milton than to read Borges in translation, or even, to say the truth, Virginia Woolf," one is entitled to ask: more important for whom? for what? when? The works of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton are undeniably *historically significant*, but by what criteria are they always and necessarily more important? One can easily imagine audiences, occasions and tasks for which the works of Borges and Woolf—or, more to the point, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison—are the more suitable and "important." For canons legitimate authors as *authorities*, and books as models and there are potentially as many pertinent authorities and fit models as there are institutional settings.

Reflection on these institutional realities of reputation-building does not require castigating institutions per se. Nor does it mean that reputation do not, in many instances, correlate with their claimed values. It does mean recognizing that merit is not objectively self-evident but radically conditioned by a plethora of variables. It does require abandoning the idea that reputations and values, any more than literary works themselves, emerge from a pure autonomous realm untainted by institutional affiliations. For it is exactly this persistent illusion that has facilitated the dismissal of the study of reputation

as a mere matter of "leisure-class gossip," in Northrop Frye's memorable words.

An "anatomy of reputation," then, is not inevitably, and should not be, a wild debunking spree—any more than it should be an uncritical affirmation of existing institutional practices. Authority derived from intellectual achievement and institutional position may or may not coincide. But the two are roughly distinguishable, given certain criteria. Reputations and the study of their making, in other words, depend upon people making careful distinctions. The need is to make the criteria for the distinctions open and clear, rather than authoritarian and secretive, and to enforce the criteria consistently in the drawing of the distinctions. Selection processes are the way that institutions make judgments and establish opinions. Institutions not only limit but also enable opportunities. The task, therefore, is to see the operative ideology of existing processes: how they are organized, in whose interests they function, and what sorts of alternatives they give rise to.

To "lift" the repression of reputation, then, one must begin by asking: Reputed for what? by whom? when, where and under what conditions? To neglect these questions often *in practice* not only fails to address reputation as an issue but also eliminates deliberate evaluation and makes for *de facto* evaluations; critics aim simply to "yield appreciation for" works which they already assume are "great." Or, even worse, they fail to examine those works which they assume are secondary or "noncanonical."

Put another way, one can "exile" evaluation, but one cannot exile reputation. Reputation and the existing canons remain. To repress reputation is merely to confirm and exalt standing judgments by ritualistic acts of exegesis, an abdication all the more inviting and easily committed in literature because of the existence of institutions designed to pre-judge for us: book review pages, book publicity departments, literary academies, writing prizes, best-seller lists. We often inherit literary opinions of educated taste long before we have the wherewithal to judge confidently ourselves. In the weak version of the process, the received opinions come merely by way of the practices of selection and exclusion (e.g., reading "the" canon). In the strong version, personal or institutional authorities legislate specific judgments about superior and inferior taste.

Putting to ourselves the above series of questions will make us more aware of the role that reputation plays in our literary—and daily—lives. For reputations are not eternal monuments. They are inextricably bound up in institutional processes and emerge through lived social practices. Literary reputations are made, not born.





KATHLEEN MOSER

## Nativity

The woman sways with donkey stride.  
Bent over his shoulders,  
she clutches his frozen mane  
and her eyes become snow.  
Her cheeks round and collapse.  
She pants clouds. Heat rises in waves  
again and again from her belly,  
beading her forehead  
and frosting ice into her hair.  
Her mind hums along the edges  
of each wrenching  
and each reprieve.

When the man lifts her and places her  
carefully in the stall,  
she breathes pungent straw  
and damp winter wool of sheep.  
Animals chew hay. Their huge eyes  
offer pity. A cow in the next stall  
moans contentment and the woman  
feels herself open,  
finally,  
into flames. Her cry  
rises with the bray of a small donkey,  
then,  
the cry of a child.

His hands, calloused and large  
feel sweet against her cheeks  
as Joseph whispers his warm breath  
and news of a son against her ear.  
Mary envelopes her baby.  
His searching mouth nuzzles her breast.  
Joseph yawns and waits  
until white sleep drifts around them  
and he blankets them with his robe.  
As night wraps the stable  
where the three of them  
breathe into dreams,  
the animals sing stars  
into darkening skies.  
The animals sing omens.



RAYMOND J. PENTZELL

## No Liar Like a Realist

When someone says, "Let me speak frankly," it is a fairly safe bet that an insult is in the offing. So also, "Let's be realistic" is often the prelude to some utterly preposterous claim. And to assert (usually as a complaint, only occasionally as a neutral observation) that some movie or television show "isn't very realistic" has long been a staple of the man-in-the-street's criticism. The assertion *may* embody some germ of meaning. If so, what?

To begin with, there is a philosophical orientation called "classical" realism, which prominently includes what my generation of students once learned to rattle off as a single, thirteen-syllable tag, "the-Aristotelian-Thomistic-tradition," or more quixotically "the perennial philosophy." This is quite different from "modern" realism. Although there are philosophers nowadays who call themselves "realists" in this modern sense, the sense itself first came into prominence not in philosophy but in the mimetic arts, in reference to painters, novelists, and playwrights. Where a "classical" realist would assert the reality of ideas, of essences, of categories, of value, and of the inner nature of things, the modern realist in the arts is someone who wishes to convince his audience that what he is depicting *looks and sounds like* reality as we commonly perceive it. To a "classical" realist, his "modern" namesake is concerned merely with appearances, accidents, the surface of things.

Thus it is interesting to observe (from my own standpoint as a historian of theatrical art) that in the early decades of our century, the playwrights and directors who were most influenced by an Aristotelian or Scholastic philosophy—"classical" realism—were in nearly every case *rebels* against the newer "realism" of a Zola or an Antoine or a Stanislavskii. They readily joined one or another of the "theatricalist" trends, in which the prime reality of the stage is *that it is a stage*: a scene of fictions, enacted fables meant to communicate true ideas, not to replicate seemingly "factual" behavior. Examples are G.K. Chesterton (who did write a few plays), Henri Ghéon, Paul Claudel, Thornton Wilder, T.S. Eliot, and the director who perhaps did more than any other individual to advance "theatricalist" ideas of stage production, Jacques Copeau. *Because* they were realists in the classical meaning of the term, they were *anti*-realists according to the modern lexicon.

"Realism," in its latter-day reference, became a concern of artists about the middle of the 19th century. In contrast to the objective *fixity* of things in the classical view, "reality"—post-Berkeley, post-Kant—was now assumed to be radically affected, if not utterly determined, by the optic nerves, the mind, and the language of the beholder. (Hence the apparently inexorable 19th-century evolution from realism to impressionism to pointillism to expressionism.) It follows that modern realism is so-called entirely relative to the audience's expectations and recognitions. There is no such thing as absolute mimesis. What the artist is trying to do is simply to convince a viewer that the artwork looks and sounds like what the viewer thinks real life looks and sounds like.

It is for this reason that old movies, even old television shows, may strike us today as stylized or conventional (even a little funny) where they were once taken seriously as lifelike, sometimes amazingly so. We are not their intended audience.

There must always be a transaction between two complementary factors, which we can call "realistic credibility" on one hand and "evident artifice" on the other hand. Any fiction, any piece of mimetic art, has to balance these effects in some way. Credibility (that which we are willing to believe) and evident artifice (that which we are keenly conscious of there being an artist *behind*) are together the terms of a paradox built into the very notion of the mimetic, or of art as illusion.

Realistic credibility is no more than our "willing suspension of disbelief," our explicit or implicit consent to the pretense that a picture or a scene in a film is an accurate depiction of whatever in real life that it purports to be copying. There is a part of our mind that knows perfectly well that an artwork is a fiction; however, to the extent that we agree to pretend otherwise, we have agreed to the artwork's "credibility." "Evident artifice" refers to our "foregrounded" awareness that the picture or scene is indeed a fiction, an invention, and the product of human artistry, the product of the skill and craft of an artist or artists who, as one group of human beings to another, are trying to communicate something. When artifice comes to the forefront of our minds, we are then most conscious that there is someone behind this artwork—an actor, a director, a playwright, a painter—who is trying to "tell us something." These two terms of the paradox always remain. But the balance may shift. "Realism" may label any artistic product that attempts to tip the balance in the direction of credibility.

So much is merely definition. I will organize my observations around three rather basic notes which I will try to dignify by calling them "principles." Two of them have corollaries, and all of them have illustrations. The illustrations will be drawn, most of the time, from television, sometimes from film, sometimes from the stage, and even a couple of times from the history of painting. But I emphasize TV and in particular dramatic fiction on TV: detective stories, soap operas, situation comedies, mini-series. The main reason for the emphasis is that we are most conscious of TV not as an art form but simply as a medium of transmission. Anything can appear on TV; it is a machine. Among the things that TV broadcasts are things that we call news: events that we suppose to be fact.

Right off the bat, TV's distinction between news (fact or alleged fact) and fiction creates problems that are not as noticeable in other media, problems that have never been quite as pronounced in film ever since film became a commercial entertainment. The time given over the newsreels or documentaries in an average film presentation back in the 1930s' and '40s, relative to the timespan of the feature film plus the short entertainment subjects, was quite minimal compared to the more nearly equal balance on television. And it is important to note that "fact" and "fiction" each has its own spectrum of effect.

Let us start with the work that the news department does, the material that we can call, in obvious quotation marks, "fact." If we started one end of this spectrum with "unexpected events on camera," we shall see what can be meant by genuine news. When the Challenger blew up a few years ago, nobody expected it, least of all the people manning the cameras and microphones. We witnessed this event raw, so to speak, at exactly the same time that the people who were broadcasting the news event were seeing it. It was a totally undigested occurrence, unmediated in every way except technically; it happened to be on camera. Now if we start at that end of the spectrum, what comes next? Perhaps at the next noticeable degree over, we could talk about the deliberate and conscious coverage of a news story as it breaks, when it is still inconclusive. A good example might be the Detroit airplane crash in August of '87, when for several days and nights camera crews and reporters gathered on the scene, dealing quickly with information as it came to them. The event itself was not "raw" on camera; it had already happened. The news crews arrived and they interviewed people; they were *covering* the story, but the story had not yet been digested. For a long time they did not know where they were going to find all the bodies, for example, and the cause and exact sequence of the crash were only gradually discovered. We were watching a news story in the process of its *becoming a story*. Aristotle defines a story as an event with a beginning, a middle, and an end. We were watching it before it had an end, and while we could not know how long the middle was.

Going one step further along this spectrum, we can look at news stories that are already planned and packaged (for instance the Challenger launch if it had *not* blown up). The camera crews are already there according to schedule; the newspeople think they know pretty much what is going to happen and how they are going to cover it. In such a scheduled event there will still of course be a great margin of improvisation, of dealing with things as they come, but nevertheless there is a prior concept that defines *what* the story is. I am sure that everyone is aware of the extent, during the past twenty years, to which demonstrators of various ilks have actually staged their protests in order to accommodate TV coverage.

**W**e are moving bit by bit toward presentations that are not simply fact, but fact *plus* something. To facts are added the mediation of opinion, of a human, even artistic, sense of form, and indeed of a motive to preach or to illustrate a prior "meaning" and to communicate that "meaning" no matter what actually happens.

Finally along that spectrum, we get to documentary stories as they are packaged into a magazine format like that of *60 Minutes*. These are scarcely "news" by even the loosest of definitions. They are stories of events which are chosen from a raft of possibilities by the producers, who at the same time determine the treatment, the point of view, and the attitude that ought to be taken by the audience. All of it is planned in advance. Camera crews and interviewers go out onto location, find the people they wish to talk to and the shots they wish to take, then edit their footage and broadcast it: "documentary" stories.



Now let us look at something a little bit more complicated, the *other* spectrum: the spectrum that comes from the other end, and meets the news or "fact" spectrum at a No-Man's Land of questions and ambiguities. The "fiction" spectrum is more complicated, because it extends over several genres: comedy, detective story, soap opera, adventure story.

But these are all things that come from the so-called "creative" department of a production company, not from the news or current affairs department. Probably at the end farthest from No-Man's Land we could place animated cartoons and puppet shows in which the characters are quite obviously not human, at least from the point of view of an adult. (I do have to insert that I am considering only adults and sane older children. I realize that, for instance, to a small child, Kermit the Frog or Mighty Mouse might be every bit as real, or realer, than President Bush.) Presentations at this end of the "fiction" spectrum are transparently artifices: tales being illustrated.

I suggest that the next move is to old-fashioned sketch comedy—televised vaudeville—and to similar "theatricalistic" events like dance-drama and mime. The most common genre throughout the earlier history of network television has been what I have called televised vaudeville, from Milton Berle to Carol Barnett, and eventually including imports like Monty Python, Benny Hill, and "Alias Smith and Jones." We recognize it from, among other notes, its cardboard-looking sets, the unambiguous visual statement that what we are watching is not real life, but rather a performance provided for our entertainment. But everything in the frame says that—acting-style, timing, costume.

Move along a bit to the more conventional, only quasi-realistic situation comedies and to the older-fashioned courtroom dramas. Such shows will be shot in a studio or on a sound-stage; there will be conventional and rather static camera placement; there will either be a live audience somewhere off camera or an obviously artificial laugh-track inserted. Nevertheless, there will be comparatively realistic sets, costumes, perhaps even dialogue. Thus we are moving unevenly towards a visual and audial sense of realism.

At the next step up, location shots may be interpolated. At the beginning of *Cheers* there is an establishing shot of a street in Boston, and thereafter the entire show is in a studio set. So it was with *WKRP in Cincinnati* and years ago with *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Under the titles there is a street scene, which is shot on location, and then everything else is obviously in a set, which itself may vary from the highly conventional to the comparatively realistic.

Another notch, and we come to more fully realistic (at least by current standards), three-dimensional space: nothing frontal, nothing that looks stagey. A shifting camera moves through the space to establish the three-dimensionality of it. The scene is on location or in sound stages in which real environments are built in exact facsimile. Actually, the set in *Cheers* comes close to that. It creates a very different ambience from that of the barroom set in "Joe the Bartender," Jackie Gleason's famous sketch back in the '50s. In *Cheers* we have a camera moving around. You can see behind the bar. You know there is a hallway to the men's room and a door into the office. All is solid, three-dimensional, and rather plausible: that is to say, a realistic space.

But we can move still further. We can reach the illusion of "slice-of-life plotting," itself a convention, but one that impresses people with its verisimilitude until they figure it out. I refer here to the triple-tracking of plots, a technique that began with *Hill Street Blues*, extended to *St. Elsewhere*, and lately is represented by *L.A. Law* and more preposterously by a short-lived show called *Nightingales*. There are three or four separate plots running at once, and they are intercut; we jump back and forth between them. The three or more "tracks" are operating at different rhythms. In each episode one track begins, another track ends, and a third stays *in media*, producing a mixture of continuity, as in a serial, and of completion, as in a traditional episode. But we are presented with a large number of characters, and because of the cutting back and forth everything they do seems to be a bit fragmentary. Such a plotting technique can set up an illusion (at least until one gets used to it) that it is the way real life is, with incidents interrupting other incidents and all kinds of events going on.

Finally, at the top of this spectrum we get "docu-drama," that is to say, plays based on actual transcripts of historical encounters, such as trials. These are dramatized with at least one eye fixed on historical verisimilitude. Their hallmark is factuality—counterfeit factuality—in all details: authentic historical reconstruction. They are still fiction in that we watch actors playing the roles, and the dialogue, no matter how much of it is taken from the historical "record," may still need to be fleshed out with original writing if only to make transitions. But the overall *look* is in the service of teaching, among other things, a history lesson. And at that point we hit the No-Man's Land. The gap (if we can continue to visualize our two spectrums) between the manipulated documentary that might appear on *60 Minutes*, and the counterfeit of historical reality that came out of the "creative" department down the hall, is often so narrow that there will be a visual, sometimes a thematic, and in any event a formal confusion between the two. We must keep in mind that "fact," even accurately reported, is not a mere synonym for "truth." There are paradigmatic truths of human existence, human feelings, and human values that are best communicated by fiction. With that as prologue, let us summarize the three principles that I believe deserve consideration:

Principle One: Facts can lead us to truth. Fiction can lead us to truth. Confusion of fact and fiction can only lead us down the path to muddle-headedness and deception.

Principle Two: Pictures speak louder than words. Realistic pictures may actually speak more subtly than words, but they carry a bigger mnemonic stick.

Principle Three: The Law of the Couch Potato.

Let us look at Principle One. The closer the form of a show comes to the border between fact and fiction, the more inevitable it becomes that truth will get confused, and that the viewer will be misled. Psychological studies have been made in which people are fed video information that is fictional but

in a realistic style, and then fed information that is factual; after a while they simply forget which is which, but regard all of it as merely "TV," and therefore, somehow, true. Great confusion is at work here. The corollary to Principle One is the real point, however: irrespective of a producer's or scriptwriter's conscious intention in the matter, a misleading message sent by confusing fact and fiction will be indistinguishable, in the viewer's perspective, from a message sent deliberately for propaganda. Once you manipulate an event and at the same time insinuate to the viewer that he is seeing mere reality, you are peddling to the viewer your own point of view, which not only fails to be "objective," but also remains covert, its subjective dimension unadmitted. There is, after all, a sense in which none of us can be utterly objective, but we can all admit to that; we can all draw attention to the fact that such-and-such is *my* view. Once you suppress that openness, you are trying to influence your audience's grasp of things without warning them that they can argue back.

No doubt we can think of dozens of television examples of such duplicity, but I shall refer rather to two classic films. Each is a *locus classicus* of the "propaganda" problem. One is a work of fiction, D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, (1915) based on a novel called *The Clansman* by Reverend Thomas Dixon, Jr., a Baptist minister. The other is a documentary, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, a filmed record of the 1934 Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg, an event that actually happened independent of its being filmed. The confusions *within* each of these examples are famous. Throughout the filming and the first months of the release of *The Birth of a Nation*, the great director, D.W. Griffith, went on the stump, in interviews and magazine articles, to insist on the historical veracity of his film. "The time will come," he predicted, "and in less than ten years, where children in the public schools will be taught practically everything by moving pictures. Certainly they will never be obliged to read history again." "History," plain fact, was his message: "They have told us repeatedly that the motion picture can impress upon a people as much of the truth of history in an evening as many months of study will accomplish. As one eminent divine said of pictures, 'They teach history by lightning.'" That "eminent divine" was Griffith's fellow historian, fellow Southerner, and fellow racist, President Woodrow Wilson.

Griffith went on to say, "We would like very much to do this, but the very reason for the slapstick and the worst that is in pictures is censorship." His outrage at censorship has a very modern ring, for he was not talking about government censorship or any legal power to silence him. He was talking about objections from people—potential customers—who were offended by his movie! This is the "censorship" that Norman Lear will cry bloody murder about when a television preacher denounces one of his television shows, the "censorship" that will be piously denounced by "lovers of freedom" when they see people demonstrate against *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

In his guise as victim of the censors he says, "Let those who tell us to uplift our art invest money in the production of a historic play of the life of Christ. They will find that this cannot be staged without incurring the wrath of a certain part of our people. *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew*, if reproduced, will cut off the toes of another part of our people." It happens that when he said this he had just filmed the movie *Intolerance*, in which two of the four concurrent plots concerned these very things. One is a Passion Play of the



death of Christ, and the other is a quite anti-Catholic treatment (and it is hard to be pro-Catholic when you choose that story in the first place) of the 16th-century massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day.

Griffith was unequivocally and repeatedly advertising his movie as objective history, though it has a fictitious, indeed melodramatic, plot. The first half of the movie is about the Civil War, via two families, friends, one Northern, one Southern. However, the head of the Northern family is a damning caricature of Thaddeus Stephens, in whose mouth is placed a collage of quotations from that real-life politician. He is called Stoneman in the movie, a ranting abolitionist who is carrying on a secret liaison with his black servant woman. Other than that, both families are perfectly nice. And in the course of beautifully photographed battle scenes intercut with domestic vignettes, we trace the comings and goings, the fights and deaths of these family-members through the entire Civil War, which is clearly meant to seem a *tragedy*. The second half of the movie concentrates on the Reconstruction era. Following a carefully researched "Assassination of Lincoln" sequence, the plot winds through the era of the carpetbaggers and the scalawags and the disenfranchisement of white people in some of the Southern states. And here it presents a horrifying picture of the prospect of black political rule, a picture in which ambitious blacks (and people of mixed blood) not only are abominable and venal politicians when elevated to state legislatures, but are moreover monsters of depravity, who spend an unconscionable time lusting after white women.

Griffith's screenplay is, in other words, a treatment that even in 1915 was regarded by many spectators as a brutally racist statement. The heroes of this second half of the film are the Ku Klux Klan, organized in the Reconstruction period to save the white race in the South from the horrible, monstrous takeover by uppity blacks.

Now the final image that the film leaves with us is not wholeheartedly a testimonial to the heroic KKK. The movie is somewhat regretful that such a thing as the KKK was *necessary*, and looks forward (allegorically) to a day when the peace and tranquility of genuine Christian love will prevail. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that this movie was made in 1915, when the revival of the 20th-century version of the Ku Klux Klan was still embryonic. Whatever the Reconstruction version may or may not have been like, the 20th-century version has been not only violently racist, but also anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, and strongly nativist, down to the present day. Without doubt, *The Birth of a Nation* served as a recruiting tool for the renascent KKK.

All Griffith talks about is the historical accuracy of his film. Interestingly enough, there were demonstrations against the film in Boston, and consequent court testimony, and there has survived a sworn affidavit by the editor of a Boston newspaper called *The Congregationalist and Christian World*. The editor, Ralph Copley, conducted a long interview with Thomas Dixon, the author of the novel on which the movie was based and Griffith's collaborator on the screenplay itself. In reporting what Mr. Dixon had said to him, Copley has his occasion to testify: "I asked Mr. Dixon what solution to the race problem he presented in *The Birth of a Nation*, and he replied that his solution was Lincoln's plan. He said this was the colonization of the Negroes in Africa

or South America, which he said President Lincoln favored during the last of the Civil War. Mr. Dixon [this is 1915 now, not 1864] said that he wished to have that plan carried out, that he wished to have all the Negroes removed from the United States, and that he hoped to help in the accomplishment of that purpose by *The Birth of a Nation*."

Thus an index of the confusion: One collaborator, Dixon, wants the film to be outright propaganda for a distinct cause. The other, Griffith, does not admit or perhaps even *see* the propagandistic bias of it. And we have President Wilson approving it, a professional historian, for after all, that is the opinion of Reconstruction that he grew up with and shared. All of this inheres in a fiction that we look at today and think of almost entirely in aesthetic terms, praising the montage and the spectacular battle scenes.

**L**eni Riefenstahl, a German dancer and model turned filmmaker, a favorite of Adolf Hitler, was chosen to make a film documentary on the week-long Nazi party rally at Nuremberg in September of 1934. Film historians at one time accused Riefenstahl and the Nazi party of setting up the entire Nuremberg demonstration as simply a set for Riefenstahl's camera, but the charge has long been disproven. She was allowed to start arranging for camera placement only a few weeks before the rally actually began, although the Nazi party, of course, did extend her every possible cooperation at that time. *The Triumph of the Will* utterly aestheticizes what in the first place was a real-life aestheticization (if I can say that) of an ugly reality: There are layers here. The question of how consciously Leni Riefenstahl made a documentary that was intended to be propaganda for the Nazi party is not exactly answerable. In one sense, it is not conscious propaganda at all. The rally itself is conscious propaganda, and Riefenstahl thinks the rally is visually beautiful. She was indeed a Nazi but a Nazi of a rather "non-political," almost (it would seem) air-headed kind. Her job as she saw it was to *caress* the Nuremberg rally, all the days of it: to edit footage filmed from different angles in such a way that the product would look gorgeous, that an overwhelming rhythm would be created, that the film action would have its own climaxes and its own enormous impact quite *beyond* what a spectator at the actually rally would experience. —Not necessarily because she was peddling Nazism, but simply because the rally itself was doing so, and she saw the rally as lovely. And she made a superb movie *out of* the rally's "raw material."

To "aestheticize" fact, to seek after beauty as the paramount significance of an event that has, in real life, quite other grounds of importance, that is the crucial dishonesty. Sergei Eisenstein's classic films ought to be recalled in this connection. His chronicles of the 1917 revolution, *Poetemkin*, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, fall between the *Riefenstahlisch* aesthetic documentary that may *function* as propaganda whatever the filmmaker's intentions, and *The Birth of a Nation*, a fiction which is, according to one of its creators, *meant* to be propaganda. What Eisenstein did was, in part, to recreate actual events; he did not, like Griffith, wave together romantic plots, but simply tried to replicate factual events after the fact, and *in so doing* to aestheticize them. But what the critic Robert Warshow said in 1955 of Eisenstein applies *tout court*:

It is just the best elements that arouse the greatest anger. When Eisenstein photographs the slow raising of the bridge in *Ten Days That Shook the World*, with a dead woman's hair stretched over the crack between the two sides as they come apart, and a dead horse hanging in its harness higher and higher above the river as the bridge goes up, the whole slow sequence being further protracted by the constant cutting in of other shots in "rhythmic" contrast, these controlled elements that once marked Eisenstein's seriousness as an artist become now the signs of an essential and dangerous frivolity which, one suspects, was part of what made him an artist in the first place. . . . It was not at all an aesthetic failure that I encountered in these movies, but something worse: a triumph of art over humanity. It made me, for a while, quite sick of the art of the cinema, and sick also of the people who sat with me in the audience, *mes semblables*, whom I suspected to be either cinema enthusiasts or Communists—and I wasn't always sure which was worse.

Now to our second "principle": Pictures speak louder than words; realistic pictures may actually speak softer than words but they carry a bigger mnemonic stick. In a drama or comedy series, the visual dimension is more memorable in the long run than the dialogue or the plots. Settings, costumes, camera work, the look of the actors and their gestural style: these may exert a greater accumulative power over a viewer's habituated imagination than will the stated, verbal messages of any particular episode. Those conservatives who worry about the "pacifistic" leanings of *Mash*, the television series now in endless rerun, may cheer up. *Mash* very probably will remain in memory far less threatening to conservative ideals of national defense than a few of its scripts would indicate. It remains in one's *visual* memory an Army comedy, plain and simple. One Klinger in drag is worth a half-dozen Aldaisms in the script.

The corollary to this principle goes right to the same target. It follows that a highly realistic setting and visual "atmosphere" can eventually habituate a viewer to accepting a show as an accurate depiction of its subject, even *when* the viewer is fully conscious that the dialogue is contrived for laughs and that the plot is a predictable, conventional artifice. Plenty of situation comedies, which we all know are highly contrived, timed for laughs, perhaps accompanied by a laugh track, are nevertheless likely to impress a viewer, over the long haul, with the *rightness*, the *factuality*, of their recurrent pictures of the "typical American living room." It doesn't look like my living room. It doesn't look like the living room of any particular viewer, but it metastasizes to become "the American living room." Children grow up thinking *that's* the way a living room should look. It's in every show from *Bill Cosby* through *Family Ties*. The relative realism of the set implants itself, by repetition, in the viewer's imagination. And one day a TV convention becomes a standard of reality.

Principle Three: The Law of the Couch Potato. This is simple. There is an inverse ratio between a viewer's satisfaction with the accuracy of a TV show



and the same viewer's urge to experience the real world. That is, to the extent that an image on the screen satisfies a viewer that it is a full and faithful depiction of a place, or a milieu, or a social situation, the viewer will to the *same* extent come to devalue his own direct experience of the same or similar places, milieux, and social situations. In other words, why get up off the couch and go out? Imagine a kid growing up watching barroom scenes such as the bistro sketches in Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*, with their painted bar (obviously nothing behind it) onto which mugs of beer or glasses of wine somehow just *come up*. Remember Jackie Gleason's "Joe the Bartender"; the camera eye goes through the swinging doors and Jackie Gleason calls the camera-eye "Mr. Donahoe," then sings "My Gal Sal" and offers the camera a beer, which, of course, no hand comes out to take. And compare either of these sketches with something like *Cheers*. Now *Cheers* is not realistic in its dialogue or in its plots, but it is in its set. Here you have three-dimensional space. Here you have a camera orbiting the bar scene, going behind the bar, seeing the taps, seeing the drains and the wet rags that the bartenders use. A kid growing up with *Cheers* will never have any curiosity about what a bar looks like. He will not have to get his Uncle Jimmy to take him to a pub and *show* him what's behind the bar.

Jackie Gleason in *The Honeymooners* would occasionally step out the window. Unless you knew from real-life observation what a sixth-floor walk-up was, you might not know what he was standing on. Out the window he goes, and he is standing there at sixth-floor level. If you are a suburbanite, you don't know that there is a fire escape out there. You have to have seen one; you have to have *visited* an inner city; you have to have left your *own* surroundings and experienced someone else's. A theatricalist, "vaudeville" set invites you to learn from real life, merely so that you may understand the set itself by comparison. But by answering all visual questions within a set itself, the TV tells you that you never have to leave your own living room. And you become a couch potato.

Throughout the whole history of Western art the question of illusion, the question of seeming versus being, has been not only complicated by but actually dependent upon paradox, conundrum, and dialectical tension. We have been looking at some versions of these paradoxes in my three "principles" and in their corollaries. We have observed that seeming reality in fictitious drama can create deceptive unreality, not only within the play, but also in the spectator's grasp of one's own off-screen experience. My argument, however, is that such conundrums, such paradoxes, have jumped to widespread and threatening levels only in the age of television. I suggest this not because our TV shows are *more* realistic in style than films are, or stage plays, or even paintings; that is not the case. But TV is more ubiquitous. It is more readily and continually available than any other artistic medium of the distant or recent past. And, therefore, it is more likely to be taken for granted. Couch potatoes are fertilized by habit. A twenty-one inch window on the world is itself a piece of domestic furniture.

Consider some older examples of what I referred to in my claim that artistic illusion has always been dependent upon paradox. From the 15th through the 17th centuries, Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque painters (and eventually stage designers) were falling all over one another to invent new

visual excitements, using a technique unknown until about 1400—linear perspective: the geometrical legerdemain by which straight lines painted on a flat surface can achieve and control the illusion of depth, when the painting is looked at from a single, prescribed standpoint. Yet in looking at a perspective painting, we are quite conscious that it is a painting, colors applied to a flat surface set perpendicular to our line of sight. In fact, it is this very awareness of material flatness that excites our fascination with the illusory depth. We admire the skill of the artist's artifice even as we fantasize ourselves into the seemingly three-dimensional world behind the picture plane. This paradox, this dual consciousness of contradiction, is essential to our perception and appreciation. This is true even if we are initially fooled into failing to notice the flatness of the painting surface, as in the *trompe l'oeil* paintings fashionable in the 18th century. We do not, in fact, "grasp" the picture at all until we move a few steps closer or to one side, and discover with surprise that we have been tricked, that the seeming doorway or window is a painting and that the painter has been clever enough to pull one over on us. Again a paradox, in many ways a game of shifting if not simultaneous perception.

When explicit, programmatic realism became the concern of certain painters in the mid 19th century, the terms of the paradox shifted, but paradox itself remained central to perceiving the artwork. The 19th-century realists were concerned to paint common people in common settings; neither, on one hand, to dwell on the monumental scenes of the classicists and the exotica of the romanticists nor, on the other hand, to moralize and anecdotalize domestic scenes in the 18th-century manner of Greuze, Chardin, and Hogarth. They claimed the goal of painting what was *there*, wherever *there* happened to be. What now must the dual consciousness of the viewer comprehend?

Now, for one thing, the viewer must add to the flatness-depth paradox the paradox between seemingly random framing of the scene (a "slice-of-life" or accidental-snapshot effect) and the subtle but still evident care with which the artist has composed his picture into a hierarchy of focal attractions. For another thing, the viewer must negotiate the incongruity between the subject of the painting (which was usually peasants or laborers or the petite bourgeoisie at their daily tasks) and the site and occasion of the painting's display, which was normally a posh gallery of grandiose Victorian decor, populated by wealthy patrons like himself.

This latter, circumstantial incongruity has been much remarked on in theatrical criticism, in the wake of Ibsen, Zola, Gorky, and their successors. The realist theater has always been the entertainment not of the real-life counterparts of the characters in the play, but of the urban gentry. The folks in the Lower Depths have continued to prefer melodramas and vaudeville.

In the theater, too, the stage picture, the acting and the dialogue, no matter how realistic they are, are inevitably counterbalanced (our paradox again) by the audience's continuous if latent awareness that everyone, performer and spectator alike, has assembled in a *theater*: a special place for a special occasion, plainly equipped with special architectural and technical features like the proscenium arch and the electric spotlights. These do not vanish merely because our attention is fixed within a stage set. And though perhaps

a bit less "special," the same sort of thing is true of the movies. After all, you have to get up and go to the theater or the movie house, pay an admission price, mingle with strangers, and observe certain etiquettes of public behavior. Playgoing and filmgoing are separate from the rest of your day, unlike TV-watching. (Even if the stage or screen performers are undressed, *you've* got your clothes on. But even if a TV performer is in formal evening dress, *you* can be sitting around in your skivvies.)

In the history of the modern theater, deliberate paradoxes (paradoxes on which our appreciation of artistry depends) multiply all over the place. Before concluding, I should like to mention just one more.

We saw that in the Riefenstahl film, *The Triumph of the Will*, it can be difficult to say whether the artist intended her work to be propaganda. Now consider this: One of the most outspokenly and intentionally propagandistic of modern playwrights was Bertold Brecht. From the late 1920s on, he hammered again and again on his belief that theater (and film, for that matter) should exist to change its audience's values and behavior. And for Brecht, moreover, this change was to serve the cause of world-wide Marxist revolution. Few, if any, Communist writers of the '20s, '30s, and '40s were as clear-eyed as Brecht was, when it came to acknowledging (as he does, for instance, in his *Lehrstück*, *The Measures Taken*) that Communism for him requires the erasing of the individual will and the subservience of the person to the collective. He will not lie about that. But how does Brecht go about it? He at once repudiates the deductiveness of stage realism; he insists that his propaganda plays present arguments with which each *individual* in the audience may take issue. He insists upon estranging the spectator from continual empathy and the suspension of disbelief, and to this end he interpolates songs, slides, announcements, and demonstrative rather than fully mimetic acting, all to keep reminding his audience that it is watching and listening to a *play*, in the theater, written and acted by particular people. For Brecht, the audience must never be deluded into supposing that the play is a slice of reality. Thus Brecht, in the service of a dehumanizing, totalitarian idea, actually extends to his spectators a respect for their individual minds and experience; a contradiction, which is why his plays have virtually no effect as propaganda. And yet it is also a reason why the paradoxical and ironic Brecht keeps and deserves his reputation as one of our century's most consummate theater artist.

By contrast, television shows us both what purports to be fact and what is fiction, but fiction that strives to be, on the surface, life-like. It shows us these things in our own homes, in the flux of our own everyday lives, and does not announce itself as a special occasion. It allows our attention to wander, our conversations, if we still have any, to continue. It is a blending of fact and fiction. It is not a paradox to be remarked upon and savored. It is a mere confusion of voices, soft, sibilant voices, perhaps seductive voices. "This is reality," the TV voices insinuate. "You do not have to test these images against your own direct experience or your own personal judgment. Now you won't even *need* direct experience. You won't even need judgment. You won't need tests. Let us show you what is." And the insinuating voices may now include a very old voice: that hissing voice that whispers: "You will without effort *know* what's real, what is. Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as Gods."



GEORGE YATCHISIN

## Room for Error

Did anyone ask if the earth was lonely  
when Copernicus made his discovery?

Begin by stating what's already truth,  
Watching to catch the minute-hand move.

Or the early sun rest on the earth's  
shoulders, softly, like a blanket. How

days begin and end. A turning of pairs.  
What's left and lost between.

JANE SATHER

## Speculations on Weldon Kees

Television voices seep through the wall  
and hope for sleep flicks off like a porch light  
in Nebraska.

Began brilliantly. Left  
behind, like a sack of oranges, poems  
paintings, music, photographs, stories.

Thus framed, another magician fell,  
exile or suicide—the car, the only clue.

There is no rest for me, no death for you,  
screwed down by insomnia's memory.

JOSEPH FIREBAUGH

## Penumbra

*St. John 1:5*

Darkness does not, of course, understand Light.  
 Comprehension exists between equals, not opposites.  
 One may overpower the other, but not forever,  
 And to overpower implies no understanding.  
 For that reason, Light is never overpowered;  
 Darkness makes repeated attempts,  
 Knowing nothing of its opposite.  
 It succeeds, or seems to, and then boasts  
 Its thousand-year Reich,  
 Its extinction of Faith,  
 Its planned human perfection,  
 Its justice redefined.

Light comprehends Darkness no better:  
 Its so different methods find only astonishment  
 When Darkness succeeds.  
 Light asks: "Can such things be?"  
 For its faith is that such things indeed cannot be.  
 Yet they are, and Light says, "Only for now,"  
 And that is Light's Faith.

Then Light asks,  
 "Why even for now?"  
 And, with that ultimate faith-searing question that *Why?*  
 Light turns away, puzzled,  
 Overpowered, for now, by its strange hunger for reasons.  
 And Darkness, alert, sees its chance.

A Story by

FRANK VICK

## *Something To Pass On*

He didn't mind that it was his week to visit Grandma after school. She was uncomplicated and sometimes wise and never used sarcasm. Her house could be seen from the nurse's second-floor office and from the home economics room where his muddled homeroom teacher taught. But once out through the heavy glassed doors and down across the hollows in the stone steps, he never looked back. He skirted the empty corner lot where one-sided fights were staged, put his books down on the top step, and crossed the porch. He had passed the upright piano and reached the stairs before the limber wooden screen door slapped shut. But he hadn't escaped his aunt.

"Hello, Stanley," she called from one of the many dim corners in her domain. A sibilant speech defect, cultivated as 'cute' when she was younger, was a permanent embarrassment to him. He hated to talk to her. "Grandma's awake. You can go right up." He quelled the rebellion stirred by her permission and took the rubber-treaded, varnished steps two at a time, his back armed against further remarks.

Grandma's corner room was lighted from north and west by tall windows. The white curtains were pinned back, the shades were raised, and the windows looked out on aged maples where the old woman claimed to watch birds nesting. He wanted to believe her, but he wondered how she could see birds and nests in that dense foliage when she couldn't see things clearly in her own room. Sometimes she mistook him for his father, but that wasn't only a matter of vision. They shared the same first name, and people said their voices were identical. He didn't want to believe the part about the voices.

The room was overfull of dark oak furniture that she and his grandfather had used in the master bedroom. This, where she lived now, had been her sewing room. She had deeded the house to her eldest daughter in return for the comfort of dying at home. Stan had a mild but recurrent curiosity about what might be in the drawers he had never seen opened. The bed was high and had tall turned posts and was bulky with quilts and pillows. He wondered how she got into and out of it nights and mornings. He never saw her in bed, always in the chair. Maybe she slept in the chair, with that blanket over her legs and that shawl around her shoulders. Maybe she never moved. He knew she hadn't left her room since Christmas or the house since the funeral of someone remote but related.

A book lay in her lap, opened, with her round-lensed, gold-rimmed glasses lying on it and her left hand, apparently forgotten, lying alongside. Its palm, half-opened as if to release something, looked smooth and slightly shiny. Her wedding ring, wider than any he had seen, seemed to press into her flesh. Her right hand, in a habit too old to have a reason, lay on her chest, partly inside the opening of her dress. It was an old-woman dress, generations old, dark



blue with a lighter blue pattern and with a whitish trim, and it was held together by a heavy cameo brooch. The aunts by blood—and his mother—coveted that brooch especially, but they would singly and in concert see it buried with her, according to her wish.

On her right hand he could see what they called age-spots or liver-spots. He didn't know what liver meant in that sense, whether the spots were caused by the liver or were liver-colored. Some dog colorations were called liver, so maybe it was the color. He remembered that the skin of her face felt soft as no other skin did. For him she had always been old. The whites of her eyes were muddy, and the irises pale grey. He had never seen her heavy lids open wide. His father had inherited her impressive nose, but Stan hadn't, and he was privately not disappointed. Her cheeks were crisscrossed with wrinkles and sunken. He had never known her to have teeth or to wear lipstick. The story was that she had pulled her own teeth one by one as they went bad. Her hair, a yellowed white, was arranged in the only style he had ever seen her wear, loosely drawn to a bun at the top, with many wisps hanging out and down. He didn't know what the original color had been—some said red—but it was well known that she had never colored her hair. Tortoise-shell combs had been stuck in here and there, apparently without pattern.

She talked more than usual today, seeming to have something special to impart, but never seeming to get to it. She was slipping back and forth between Stan now and his father at an earlier age. He recognized one of his father's favorite anecdotes when she urged him to argue properly with his Pa, not to give in falsely, because that left him cranky for days after. When the flow subsided, he tried to bring her back to the present. "Grandma, I have to go now," he said gently. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"I won't be here tomorrow." She was lucid and in the here-and-now. By her firm tone and matter-of-fact manner he was instructed to show no unusual reaction to that information.

"I'll tell Dad to come up tonight."

She thought for a moment. "Tonight is his union meeting, isn't it?"

The boy honestly didn't know.

"Well, he ought to go to his meeting. And he was here only yesterday. No, don't say anything." She meant to her, now.

He had known that. They had always communicated easily. Before now, there had been no need to define his feelings about her, beyond knowing that no secret escaped her and that she quietly wielded considerable power. She had given him his first 'grownup' novel, and she had faced down his formidable mother on the issue of long pants. At this moment, however, her physical presence was making him uneasy. He was grateful for the brightly-colored plaid blanket, a gift from the cousin who had traveled to the British Isles, because it concealed her legs. From his parents' remarks about her 'condition,' he pictured them as swollen and heavy and discolored, with some clear but unwholesome fluid seeping out. He remembered them in sagging stockings and with black, thick-heeled shoes, climbing the stairs inside the Statue of Liberty. That was better.

Her voice startled him. "I know you won't make a fuss, Stan."

A sound opened his mouth, a sound that was the beginning of what she would call a fuss. Its sudden urgency surprised him, and he couldn't identify the emotion that impelled it. He wished vainly that he had been able to remain silent.

Her left hand surprised him by curling around his right wrist and by being warm as it was, and dry. He had known it would be smooth. Knowing no proper way to respond to the grip, he endured it. Another of his father's nostalgic stories came back—an admiring one about how he had been disciplined as a boy. She would call him to where she sat and clamp his wrist in a grip he described as powerful and inescapable, and she would hold him there until she had made her point.

This boy could have twisted out of her grip or peeled free of her fingers with no real effort. For that reason he held very still, denying her weakness. He would have stood there exactly as he was until she dozed or died or—and the idea seemed unworthy—until he had to go to the bathroom. He wanted to retreat from the thought of how *she* managed those functions, but the question pressed itself upon him. There had to be a bedpan somewhere, exuding a faint, dark, bitter stink, however whitely scrubbed it might be. Oh, God, what if she's sitting on it right now? Still he didn't move. His skin prickled, but he didn't move.

"You're the one I can tell anything to." She registered his impulse to object. "No, not even your cousin Peggy. She'd try hard to be strong, but the effort would wear me out. No, you're the one that has what's needed."

He didn't know what was needed. He didn't know what he had. Indifference? Detachment? Precocious wisdom? Premature resignation? Premature ejaculation? Stop fooling around! He didn't know.

"You can keep your own counsel. And you know what you know without having to ask a lot of questions."

Now she had paralyzed him. He wanted to ask everything. He wanted to know what it was to have lived so long and now to be dying. Did you really hold Grandpa down when they were taking his leg off with only whiskey? How could you pull your own teeth? Did you really know the exact moment when Uncle Herb was killed in the first world war? Did you really lay out your own daughter Sarah dry-eyed?

She gave his wrist a final squeeze and released him. "You'd better get to your paper route, now." He had given up the paper route for a job in a hardware store. "Send Dorothy up when you leave. Tell her to give you a glass of milk."

Then she alarmed him by fumbling among her wrappings, finally bringing forth from that obscure danger a gold pocket watch. The chain and elktooth fob had gone to a cousin. "This is for you. It was your grandfather's. He wound it too tight and broke it the day he died. But it's still worth something, and I want you to have it."

The watch was warm and smooth and solid, had a satisfying heft. It had been much talked about and much coveted. Stan had wondered why such a fuss over a watch that was out of style and didn't work. Now that the watch was heavy in his hand, his, he understood.

"It's yours now. That's the way I want it."

He waited. There had to be more.

She put on her glasses, hooking on the earpieces one and then the other, and studied his face. She nodded. "You can do what you have to do."

That was it, then. She wasn't going to say any more. Those were her final words for him. Were they meant for now? Or for the rest of his life? Or both? Later he would not remember whether he had thanked her or said goodbye. On his way out, touching as little of her house as possible, he ignored the aunt, knowing she was alert to his movements and would go up anyway. And he didn't want to drink the milk of that house just then.

The sky was deep and blue with wisps of cloud very high and no enemy bombers. The leaves of the shade trees moved only slightly. There was little traffic beyond dogs and bicycles. Stan walked the few blocks to the hardware store without taking notice of anything not directly in his path. He felt no identifiable emotion. The idea of the old woman's death had been peripheral, had required no preparation. Now a secret internal finality had been reached, and she in her undramatic way had made him a conspirator. And he could feel the watch heavy in his pocket. And that was all.

Josh's Hardware—no one used its original name—was narrow and dark, except for pools of light from somber hanging fixtures. Its walls were lined with built-in drawers whose labels were the flaps of boxes the screws, brads, washers, and numberless other items had come in. It smelled of thinners and lubricants. Regular customers knew they had to walk all the way back to the workroom to get Josh's attention. Bent, bald, mottled, Josh was older than Stan's grandmother, but he still opened and closed his shop every day, six days a week. "How's your grandma?" he shouted over his deafness.

"She's dying." Stan hadn't known he was going to confess that, but he was instantly certain that it was all right to tell Josh, who would know what to do with such intelligence.

"She's tired? Of course, she's tired." The opportunity flitted away. "Woman that old, been through what she's been through, of course she's tired. Had that heart cough for forty years, she has. Takes Rock and Rye for it. Uses a spoon so you can't call it drinking, but it's a damn big spoon. You can tell her I said so. She'll get a kick out of that. A damn big spoon, tell her."

The "cough medicine" story was a family legend, but Stan had never heard the cough itself. Still he nodded agreeably, adding a small smile meant to be appreciative.

"Want to watch the store? I got some glass to do."

Stan had met Josh over a broken window, and had been enthralled by the old man's sure dexterity with glass cutter and putty knife. Josh had noticed and had hired him to help around, as he called it. The pay was a third less than the paper route had brought in, but that was all right. Still, it had been months now. "Can I do the glass?" he asked, made uncomfortable by his enforced loudness. He asked again. "May I do the glass? I'd like to try it on my own."

"Think you're ready, do you?" Stan kept his face composed for another scrutiny. Josh paused long enough to have decided and changed his mind several times. "Okay, go ahead. You've watched me enough. Call me if you get in trouble."

The work took a long time. Stan laid a sheet of glass on the bench, measured and marked it, and laid the straight edge across it. He held the Red Devil



glasscutter in his right hand and took a deep breath. He set the cutting wheel on the mark and drew it cleanly and decisively along the straight edge. It made a tiny crunching sound and left a fine line. He fitted the correct groove of the cutter over the edge of the glass, took another deep breath, and snapped off the waste. The glass broke neatly. He smiled to himself and resisted calling Josh to see his accomplishment.

The glass fit into the frame nicely, and he hammered in the flat triangular points to secure it easily enough. But the putty defeated him. Watching Josh's big, speckled stiff-looking hands smooth a lump of putty into a perfect seal, perfectly angled and smooth, had not prepared him for taking the task into his own self-conscious hands. The old man's moves were impossible to imitate. Stan felt an intense temptation to glide silently out the open back door. Maybe he could get the paper route back. Finally he finished. It looked like a boy's work, but it was done. Then he looked at the ancient wall clock and was discouraged. There was time to do more.

The second pane took almost as long, but the work was visibly better. Still there was time to do one more. Grimly, without hope or pleasure, he began again. This one moved not much faster, but looked almost good. Almost. Enough to convince him that in time he would master the work. But he would have to watch Josh more closely on the corners.

"Not bad." That was more praise than the boy had hoped for. It was almost excessive. "Not bad for the first time. Your hands'll get the feel of it. Better sweep out now and get home to supper."

Stan scattered sweeping compound lightly and pushed the stiff old pushbroom down the long aisle toward daylight. This undemanding task was almost a reward. He firmly refused to look and see if the old man was correcting his work. Then he walked under old shade trees, past squared lawns, over buckled sidewalks until he reached home.

The dining room was crowded with heavy oak furniture—long table and its chairs center, a sideboard, a glassfronted cabinet at each end displaying the good china and glassware and a mixed collection of ceramic knick-knacks. The father sat at the head of the table, the mother at his left, handy to the kitchen, and the five children were placed according to age. No one arrived late for dinner and no one left the table without permission.

Stan brought out the watch to show to his father. His parents' facial expressions showed little, but he knew they were gratified that the watch had come to their branch of the family. He shared their triumph only distantly.

His father turned the watch over and over in his hands. He opened the case and snapped it shut several times. Absently, he began to wind it, then remembered. "He broke this watch the day he died, you know," he told the family in general. "Sat there on the edge of the bed, winding it and winding it until it broke. He was just about totally blind by then, couldn't see the numbers any more, but he wound it and wound it and finally broke it."

"Maybe it can be repaired," Stan offered.

Both parents shook their heads. "No," his father said, "anyone who could have fixed this watch is long since dead and buried." Stan sensed that they didn't want the watch to be fixable. In all the years since his grandfather had

died, no one had suggested having it repaired. It was as if the old man's dying damage had been as much a heritage as the watch itself. He perceived this without understanding it.

His mother spoke. "I felt sure Eddie would get the watch." She seemed perversely disappointed that her prediction had been wrong.

"No," the father said, "Eddie got the tools, not that he'll ever use them." The old woman had deliberately written no will, had clearly tried to avoid wrangling over valuables. But every gift was observed and remembered, and relationships were permanently changed according to the final disposition of inheritables.

Stan couldn't think about what anyone else had. His watch was being handled, opened and closed, having its stem turned uselessly and painfully, having its spiky Roman numerals examined, its manufacturer's name and trade mark read aloud, then being agonizingly handed on to another inspector. Food cooled unnoticed. He followed the watch unhappily, sure it would be ruined or lost if he glanced away.

One sister said, "A string of pearls is just as good as any old watch."

"That's right," agreed the other, "but you're not allowed to wear it."

"I can when I'm old enough! Mom said so!"

"Well, you're still way too young!" This sister had jade earrings, but wouldn't be allowed to have her ears pierced even when she did come of age.

The younger brother said, "Tiger Eye cufflinks are just as good, too."

The older brother muttered, "I don't know why *he* should be the favorite."

"She has no favorites!" The mother's voice was edged with held anger. "She had no favorites among her own children, and she has no favorites among the grandchildren!" After a pause, "There are no favorites in this family!"

The silence bore a well-known menace. Eating was resumed as a charm against personal disaster.

Stan couldn't eat yet. He reached across the table—in itself an act of **S**daring—and picked up his watch. His mother held out her hand. He felt his chest go empty. He felt a familiar, despairing helplessness. But it wasn't fair! There had to be something he could say that would let him keep what was his by right. His mother's hand waited, demanding and tremorless. Without looking, he knew the expression on her face. Eating had stopped. Still he held the watch. What could he say? What could he say? He wanted to say, 'I'm old enough,' but the two older ones didn't have their possessions, either. Maybe they didn't care enough. "It's *mine*," he said firmly. "She gave it to *me*."

He stared at an innocent dusting of pepper on the white-on-white tablecloth. No lightning struck, but his mother was immovable. The hand remained exactly where it had been. The conflict shifted silently into another phase. Soon a punishment would be added. "You'll have it," she said, her calm voice more disheartening than her angry voice, "when it's appropriate for you to have such things." The next was for the benefit of all. "And not before."

Carefully blank faces, wary of drawing attention, watched obliquely. His father would not help. Whatever the man thought privately, he would never interfere with his wife's handling of family matters. Stan saw himself driven finally to adding the disgrace of tears to his accomplished defeat. He felt a

fierce impulse to throw the watch at her. Another to throw it through the glass of a china cabinet and smash her precious junk. A more defiant one, merely to drop it on the table for her to pick up herself.

No.

Careful not to touch her, he dropped the watch into her palm. She slipped it into her apron pocket. It was gone. She hadn't even glanced at it.

Now it was possible to be gracious. "You'll appreciate it more when you're older."

'Keep it,' was in his mouth, but he said nothing. Time enough on his twenty-first birthday when with much ceremony they would present it and he would hand it back with some appropriately punishing remark.

His father cleared his throat. "Look at it this way," he said, "you'll have something to pass on."

Eating resumed.

"Eat your supper," his mother said quietly.

"I'm not hungry." He was sincere, but he knew that the saying of it was futile.

"You'll sit there until you do." Her intonation was unchanged, but this edict had the force of remembered scarcity.

He cut into his slice of beef and found that he could chew it. The mashed potatoes were cold and drying under congealed gravy, but they were edible. Only the peas tasted at all good.

"Did she know who you were?" His father asked. "I mean, the whole time? I mean, she wasn't mixing us up again, was she?" He trailed off back to his food.

Stan had forgotten her. But an answer was required. "She knows it's your union meeting night."

"Still pretty sharp," his father said proudly. "I don't care what they say." He shook his head in wonder at the demonstrated sharpness of his mother. "She'll be around a good while yet, never mind what anyone says."

"Maybe you could stop in and see her." Stan had not intended to speak. He tried to force his awkward suggestion to make sense. "On the way to your union meeting." He knew instantly that he had invited ridicule.

The boy endured yet another scrutiny, this time a baffled one. "Grandma's house isn't on the way to the union hall." The brothers and sisters surrendered deliciously to smothered snickers.

"She might want to see you," Stan persisted, whether to justify the suggestion or for another reason, he wasn't sure.

"I just saw her last night," the father explained, elaborately patient. "And I can always stop in tomorrow."

Now was the time to say what he knew. But his grandmother had trusted him in particular not to speak. And he needed to withhold something from his mother and father. The moment passed. He was never sure why he had not spoken.

"Finish your supper," his mother said in her encouraging voice. "It's time for dessert."

Dessert represented generosity, constituted a small reward or consolation. But, unlike other foods, it could be refused. "I don't want any," he said, and knew that he was understood.

Later, his sister leaned into the room he shared with his older brother. "Aunt Dorothy is on the phone. 'Stanley left his books here again.'" Her mimicking



of the lisp was perfect. "Are you going over to get them?" By her manner she conveyed the opinion that he ought to, but he knew she would cover for him if he didn't. "Maybe Dad would drive you up."

"I'll get them tomorrow."

"Mom's gonna want to know why you're not doing your homework."

"Tell her I left them at Josh's."

The funeral parlor was warm and full of rustling and breathy whispers. "We're not burying your mother," the softly-moving, soft-spoken man intoned near Stan's father's ear, "just the house she lived in." Stan watched his father nod in appreciation or dismissal and took his turn being softly touched into his proper place among the folding chairs and mourners. He watched the aunts, knowing in advance which would weep openly, which would cross herself, which would kneel long, longer, and longest. His girl cousins had become women today, heeled, hatted and gloved, perfumed and walking with a differently balanced sense of their sex that put new distance between them and him.

There were too many flowers, many more than the old woman would have wanted put to such a use. The air was slow with their forced sweetness. His turn was approaching. He would have to walk that exposed distance of soft carpet to that kneeling thing with its imitation leather and spend that moment of prayer within touching distance of the polished wood and satin luxury more sumptuous than she would have allowed herself, and look at her dead, look at her simple prophecy plainly fulfilled.

When he had pushed himself through the heavy air, the sighs, and his awkwardness, all of it seemed false. He had known about the stopping of orifices and the embalming, but he was not prepared for a full-cheeked, blushing Grandma, younger by a generation than he had ever seen her. Her eyes were closed and her nose asserted itself toward the ceiling and the sky. That much was right. And the brooch was plainly there, and her wide wedding band pressed into her flesh. She was wearing a dress he had never seen, new-looking, its colors undulled by care and time. It had clearly been set aside for this use years ago, probably purchased with this time in mind. Her hands were folded as they had seldom been in life, holding a rosary she had owned but never used. Her right hand should have been resting on her chest, partly inside the dress, but there was no moving it now. He forgot to pray. Her voice came back saying, 'I won't be here tomorrow,' and he knew he would never tell anyone now. He remembered her black curly winter coat and matching hat.

On his way back to his place he saw his father and his father's sisters seated in a row. It was a tableau he had never seen before, and it showed him what he had never thought to look for. They all *did* have her nose. They all *did* resemble each other now. And they all looked. . . older, newly old. He knew they would die stoically in their turns. And in that instant he knew that the same was already expected of him.

BERTOLT CLEVER

## Halftime

The yowling of the cat out in the breeze;  
     it isn't ours: so I don't like it.  
     Ours has a sweeter sound,  
     clucking nearly like a duck: "mok-mok-mok."

The curtains, The light. And the fat book. The window.  
 I don't know where I am, in my life; but I know  
     the game's not at halftime yet: so I have a moment.  
     (A squirrel makes a steep quick climb.)

I know that I tried to win it all in the first half.  
 I know that was dumb. If not dumb, exhausting.

I know by now how full the silence is;  
 and there I was with silence full of Robert Lowell. . .

Footsteps. The clunk of the toilet lid. Scrubbing.  
 Everything is synchronized when I hear  
     the dry squeeze of a kiss as she passes my door,  
     walking strongly on her toes, (finally) cleaning the room  
     we agreed was hers, still full  
     of empty boxes after the wedding.

Maybe once every third time by I hear the kiss,  
     or she bobs her head in, smiles.

"What are you reading?"

"I don't know. Poetry."

"Isn't the ballgame on?"

"Yes. But it isn't interesting. Yet."

It's interesting only when exhaustion strips raw everything  
     and all that's left is talent.

And we know it is our own.

ANN MAUREEN GALLAGHER

## Demeter

My mother had no time for peas.  
 String beans were of a stauncher breed  
 and spinach urged upon the plate as  
 well as broccoli and beets. But  
 peas were "frivolous" somehow within  
 her view of things.  
 And her view of things, indeed,  
 made up the construct of my  
 world. Commandments not on stone perhaps  
 became the ones I had to  
 own and few had wings beyond her nod  
 that this was so. And as far as there  
 was God, I saw her features in  
 his face. Not as if replaced, that is,  
 as with a mask; much more the case, he  
 found a home within the structures  
 of her bone and rested there.  
 It was years before I saw as two  
 (and tear, of course) the deity apart  
 from her and loved them both. Confused, I  
 sometimes neither loved and shivered with the  
 guilt, the glow of never really knowing who  
 each was and when.

Now she's forgotten she  
 was God and seized another world for now where  
 Possibly there's finally place for peas,  
 while I still stumble on the word and skip such  
 mundane menu offerings  
 as these.



A Story by

CHARLES BRASHERS

## *Rough Creek, Texas – 1888*

When Cindy bolted around the corner of the house, yelling, "Momma! Indians killed the Johnsons!" she came face to face with her mother and four Comanches at the porch step. The Comanches wore baggy pants and big knives in their belts, but no shirts. The Johnsons' horses were grazing in the yard.

Della, Cindy's mother, was struggling with the leader of the Indians. She held her forearms up before her defensively and grasped the handle of his axe with both hands; the Indian pushed at her wrists with his other hand and tugged at her cuffs. Startled by Cindy, he jumped back, lunged for her, and swung his axe. Cindy had not stopped running, so she slid through the downward swish of his arm and into the circle of Comanches. They were all reaching for their knives or lifting their old rifles. Della immediately pushed through into the circle also, stuck her hands up in the air, making fluttering gestures, as she cried out, "Tsu-ta-gu. . .Gun-e-sti. . .Atsila."

The Comanche leader stopped his axe in mid-air, surprised, and gazed at Della. The others stopped, too.

Cindy felt herself peeing, wetting her underpants and ruffled dress, then she stopped suddenly, shocked, and gazed at Della, too. She had never heard her mother say such words before. It was like another language. Somehow, Cindy knew that Della had just invited the Comanches to eat.

The leader seemed to understand. He turned to Della and said, experimentally, "Ada-sta-yu-huski Tsu-ta-ga?" Cindy could tell by his awkwardness that he only knew a few words of that language.

Della could not make her hands stop fluttering, but she kept nodding and smiling desperately at the Comanche. "Yes, Tsu-ta-ga! Chicken! Tsu-ta-ga! Chicken!" she repeated.

Confused, Cindy let her eyes drop. Mary Beth Jewel's long, blonde hair hung from the leader's belt, her mother-of-pearl barrette still fastened in the hair. At the end of it was a wad of blood. A moment more and Cindy's hair would have been hanging there, too—her coarse, dark hair.

"Cindy, don't—don't just stand there," said Della, her voice catching. "Go snag f-four chickens. K-kill and pluck 'em."

"Momma, they ki—"

"I know that," snapped Della. "Go on and catch, and catch those chickens! Quick!"

"Which four should I get?"

"Any four. The best you can find."

Apparently, one of the Comanches understood a little English. "Best," he repeated, then he spoke in Comanche. The others murmured appreciation.

Cindy's younger sisters, Emma and Anna Lee, were standing in the open doorway, staring. Her older brother, Allen, was standing beside Della, protectively, but his eyes were spread wide as if he were trying to see at night. He kept staring at Mary Beth's hair.

Cindy caught four chickens with the poultry hook, but she didn't check to see if they were the best she could find. *Where'd she learn those words?* kept running through her mind. She wrung the chickens' necks and threw them on the ground to flop and kick around till they were dead. *It was another language.* She couldn't manage to break the neck of one chicken, so she went to the wood pile to chop off his head with the axe. As her axe came swishing down, she realized, *Those were Indian words!* As if it were real, she felt an axe swishing through her head, felt her hair hanging from a belt. The chicken was flopping around, its wings mixing its own blood with the sand. In her mind's eye, she saw Mary Beth flopping around like that. "It wasn't me!" she cried, then got a hold of herself. She had killed chickens dozens of times.

In spite of herself, she broke down crying. She sat on the chopping block, stuffed her hands between her knees, and cried. Mary Beth Jewel was her best friend. Big tears dropped on her arms and the ruffle near the hem of her thin cotton dress. She could hear Della saying, 'Now, Cindy. Don't start crying. You've got to try to help out. You can't do anything if you're blubbering. So don't cry.' She blinked her eyes dry. But she whined in grief in spite of herself.

She pulled herself together. She had to do something, something to help out. She gathered the chickens and pulled off the feathers as best she could. Most of the small feathers came off easily enough, but the large feathers were almost impossible to get out without hot water to make them slip. Patches of skin came off with the feathers. She flung them away, hysterically, and broke down crying. She could hear those Indian words with perfect memory—"Tsu-ta-gu gun-e-sti atsila." And she still saw her dark-haired mother's hands fluttering up.

**W**hen Cindy came back with the chickens, the Comanches were putting big rocks around a fire in the yard.

Della was more at ease, but she still had trouble saying the things she wanted to say. "Tsiski," she said, then corrected it to "Uni-tsiski ge-tsa-di?" Her fluttering hands made motions toward the gray, clapboard house. Cindy had never noticed before how prominent her mother's brow ridge was, nor how piercing her eyes.

The Comanches each took a whole chicken and held it over the fire with a stick, though none of them ever lay down his gun. Soon, the chickens were dripping grease that splattered on the fire and sent up plumes of sharp-smell-

ing smoke. The chickens turned a golden brown. Their feet burned off, but the Comanches just left the black curls of them hanging.

The Indians sat around the fire, laughing and chatting, but Cindy could see they were keeping a close watch on the whole family. Once, the spokesman turned to Della and called, "Amo-atsila!"

She did not understand.

He repeated, "Amo-atsila!" angrily, so that Cindy felt herself dodging. Then he said it in English: "Whiskey!"

"N-no," stammered Della, her teeth chattering. "No have amo-atsila."

They turned back to their roasting chickens.

When the chickens were cooked, the spokesman pulled off a drumstick and offered it to the little girls. Both Emma and Anna Lee shrank back, too bashful and frightened to accept anything.

"Take it," said Della, urgently. "Do whatever they want. Don't hang back." But the little girls were scared and could not make themselves accept the chicken. Cindy held her breath. Allen caught on, took Anna Lee's hand, and led her to the spokesman. She still wouldn't take the chicken leg, but the spokesman did not object when Allen took it from him and handed it to her. She looked at Allen, he nodded, and she started eating it. The spokesman grinned at her. Cindy began breathing again. The Indian offered a wing and some breast meat to Emma. She took it, but just held it in her hand.

Anna Lee chewed her chicken leg and glared at the spokesman. Cindy could see that Anna Lee had the same hard, dark eyes as he did. Della and Cindy also had those eyes and heavy brow ridges, though Allen and Emma had the soft, brown eyes of their father. Daddy should be home, Cindy thought, instead of being in Granbury on his butter and egg route. No, he shouldn't; then they'd just kill him, too, the way they had killed the whole Johnson family. They had even killed all of the Johnson's cows: lifted their noses and slit their throats, so they died walking and blubbering. Cindy kept comparing her mother's slightly dark complexion with the spokesman's ruddy chest. They weren't at all alike.

When the Comanches had eaten their fill of chicken, they belched, wiped their hands on their thighs, and abruptly decided to leave. They caught up the Johnson horses, got on them, and rode away toward Rough Creek Hollow, where the trail led to Comanche Peak and the Wilderness Route. The spokesman turned and waved to Della, calling, "O-si-yo, Tsa-la-gi ulunita."

"Ga-si-yu," Della yelled. Then she added, "Wa-dan!" as she walked toward the departing Comanches, waving. Almost under her breath, she muttered, "Cindy, get the children in the house. Quick and quiet. Don't let them think you're rushing." All the time, she continued strolling and waving to the Comanches.

Cindy and the children rushed into the house, just barely before Della burst through the door, slammed it shut, and swung down the bar. She turned to face the room; her eyes were big and unseeing, her mouth still gaping open. Then she slumped, flowing like water down the face of the door, her arms and legs jerking as if she were having a fit and her teeth chattering uncontrollably. Half-way down, she fainted and sprawled side-long into the room.



Cindy lifted her mother's arms and helped her walk to the plank table, where Della sat in a cane-bottomed chair.

"They're gone," said Allen, who was peeking through a window.

"Momma, where'd you learn them words?" asked Cindy.

Della was unable to talk. She quivered. Her breath came in whoops, as if she had something wrong with her chest. She looked at Cindy, then burst out laughing and crying simultaneously, hysterically. She hugged Cindy and the little girls in turn, her tears wetting their faces. She even hugged Allen, though he was fifteen years old.

Emma and Anna Lee gazed at their mother, quiet because they didn't understand. "Them Indians had Mary Beth's hair," said Emma.

"Hush, Emma," said Cindy. "They killed all of the Johnsons, and probably Mary Beth, too. They came here to kill us."

Anna Lee, the youngest, couldn't seem to understand. "Then, why didn't they kill us?" she asked.

"Momma, are we Indian?" Cindy demanded.

Della glared at Cindy. She nodded "yes" ever so slightly. Then she found her voice. "I thought we'd outlived it." She immediately broke into a fit of coughing, so she had to get a gourd of water from the drinking bucket. She spilled water into the lap of her gray, cotton dress, trying to put the dipper to her mouth. "I thought you'd never have to know," she went on, shivering again. She went and looked out the window.

"Lord-a-mighty," said Della, trying to understand. "This is 1888, after all; it's not like we were in the frontier still." She looked at her son and three daughters. "I thought we'd never have to live with it again."

"Live with what?" asked Allen.

"What kind?" insisted Cindy.

Della just gazed at Cindy.

"Momma, I'm twelve years old. I've got a right to know."

Della stared at her children, one by one, and pushed a stray hair back from Anna Lee's face. Her hands were shaking. Suspicious, she went to the window again, pulled aside the curtain, and looked out.

She came back and sipped from the water dipper. "We're Cherokees," she said with too much emphasis. "Grandma was a full blood. Over in —"

Backing away, Cindy protested softly, "No! No!"

Della coughed, but forced her voice to go on. "Over in Rusk County. She was a Texas Cherokee. They were all massacred—Oh, God! Those Comanches!" She ran to the window and gazed out again.

Cindy felt something as hairy and as big as a mountain lion, jumping at her from the darkness.

Della went on, as if explaining to herself, ticking the points off one after the other on her fingers. "Grandma wasn't massacred because she had married Grandpa Hart. He was a white trader and lived outside the Cherokee territory. Mother was half-blood, but she was white enough to pass."

She paused, gazing into the dipper. Cindy stepped backward, shaking her head in denial.

"Yes," — Della rubbed her hand over her eyes, trying to understand — "Mother was white enough to pass. She hid in that as long as she lived. I've been hiding in it, too."

Cindy stared at her, amazed, horrified, confused. Then Della began talking rapidly, urgently.

"After Momma and Daddy died, I stayed mostly with Grandma. E-di-li-sa — that was her Cherokee name. But she called herself Ada-Eliza. She taught me those sentences. That saved —"

She grabbed Emma and Anna Lee, compelling, forcing them to listen. "You've got to learn those words. All of you. I hated being Indian. Hated those trips to Oklahoma Territory. Everybody was so poor and dirty. I hated being Indian. But I'm not going to hate them anymore. Thank God, I remembered those words! I hadn't thought of them in twenty years. Cindy, I want you to learn those words. Allen, you too. You've got to know something about your Cherokee —"

"No!" shouted Cindy, backing away, around the table. "No! I won't do it! I'm not Indian. I didn't do any of it. It wasn't me!"

Della gazed at Cindy. Her eyes were hard and dark, demanding allegiance to the blood.

"No!" shrieked Cindy. She turned, unbarred the door, and ran out of the house.

Della ran after her, but stopped at the door. "Cindy, you come back here! You hear? Those Comanches may come back."

Cindy whirled around, expecting a Comanche knife in her chest. Nothing was behind her but the house, and her ruddy-complected, dark-eyed mother standing on the covered porch. "No! No!" she shouted, running toward Rough Creek Hollow.

**B**riar knives on the path and hatchets in the bushes ripped at her dress, and she heard screeching sounds all around. She ran, swishing under tree branches coming down, until she collapsed, out of breath.

She sat up at once, looking around furtively. She felt helpless, her useless hands fluttering in the air before her, just waiting there for them to come back. She had nothing to protect herself with.

Creeping under the thick foliage of a big wild-lilac bush, Cindy found the trunk of a small bois d'arc tree. It had died in the thick shade when it was a little over an inch thick, then something had broken it off about twenty inches from the ground. She could see herself swinging it like a club and hitting a Comanche on the chest or in the stomach. She pulled it up easily. The root-ball was the size of a baby's head and had three short jagged roots. She hit the ground with it to test it. It was strong and sound. The jagged roots cudgeled the ground. She hit the ground again, for the feeling of safety. It felt clean and smooth.

At the edge of the lilac bush, Cindy could see a small swarm of fireflies, hovering. If you went near them, they went out. That was their way of hiding. The hollow was full of life that hid by pretending to be something else. Armadillo families rolled up in little hard balls. Snakes lay like rotted sticks. Bobcats slipped away like water in the sand.

The grandmother Cindy had never known had hidden in pretense; Della had hidden in secret. But the secret had saved the family. Cindy realized that the Comanches had not killed all of them, because they recognized that Della was Indian. And now, for a different reason, Cindy was hiding, too. She felt rotten and hard and as transparent as water. She stopped herself from beginning to whimper.

An owl screeched in the hickory tree overhead. Thinking, 'It's them, they've come back to scalp me,' she burst from her hiding, screaming, smashing through the bushes and vines. She wasn't going to let them catch her. Crashing, smashing sounds—they were right behind her. Her side hurt from the running, and her lungs were about to burst. Desperate and out of breath, she turned and lifted her club at the last moment to face her attackers. There was nothing there.

She slumped to the hollow floor, exhausted, unwilling to go on, unwilling to go on standing, but she hopped up again at once. She had to get out of the darkness of the hollow. She couldn't stay there. Cautiously, she went on, watchful, silently creeping through the undergrowth along the Indian path, and came out at the Jewels' house.

**M**rs. Jewel's naked body was tied to a post down by the barn. Under him, lashes and a few stubs of fence planks still smoldered. The cooked flesh of his legs stunk so that Cindy caught her breath. His leg bones stuck out white, except where the curls of his feet were black, down by the fire. His body was a big naked blister.

As Cindy stared at him, he lifted his head, barely conscious.

"Comanches," he rasped. "Get help." Then he fainted.

"What?" she cried, surprised that he had been able to speak. Then she realized she had to do something. She dropped her club, untied his hands and shoulders, and lay him down as gently as she could, putting a burnt stub of fence plank under his head for a pillow. *Butter for burns*, she thought, then ran to the milk-house and found butter in the cooler. She remembered to take him a dipper of water.

When she lifted his head to give him a drink, a patch of skin came off his neck and stuck to her hand. She slung it away, dropping the dipper and letting his head bang down again. He was unconscious and couldn't drink. She smeared butter on the burns on his face.

She whirled around suddenly, certain that something or someone was behind her. She grabbed her cudgel again. The barn door yawned open. She dropped the butter and ran toward the house.



Mary Beth's younger brother lay on the ground, right outside the back door. Cindy stopped, gazing at him, standing on her tip-toes because she almost stepped on him. Three, four, five knife wounds gaped at her from his chest, and part of the skin on his head was peeled back. She could feel the wounds, two, three, four, popping open on her chest and the flap of her forehead flapping back. His face was whole, but blood had splattered all over his arms and body. He had flopped and kicked around like a chicken in his death throes, making 'angel wings' in the blood and sand. An axe in her hand came down on a chopping block.

She jumped frantically over him, ran into the house, and latched the door. In the dim light, she saw that Mary Beth's sister, her mother, and the baby were dead in the house. They had all been stabbed several times and scalped, except for the baby, who didn't have enough hair. Mrs. Jewel's tongue had been cut out, and her back broken. The baby had been beaten like a whip against the table.

Cindy gazed for a moment, paralyzed, her back pressed tight against the plank door, her tongue feeling like it was being cut out. She couldn't make her knees be still, and she heard someone whimpering. It was herself. She realized she couldn't stay in a room with three dead people in it. She couldn't just wait for the murderers to come back and kill her, too. She burst out the front door and ran.

Mary Beth was lying in the open yard. Her belly and chest were swollen with gas and stretched the seams of her dress. Cindy kneeled beside Mary Beth and picked up her cold hand before she noticed that the top of Mary Beth's head had been taken off and her skull had been cracked open. Cindy could see Mary Beth's brain. Blood had drained in the ripples.

Cindy's stomach leaped as she felt the swish of an axe pass, not passing this time, but catching her skull, taking away part of it as easily as if it were a melon. No, it didn't swish past. She had grabbed the handle with both hands, turned it, turned and swung the axe at her attacker's chest, sliced through a neck, sliced also through Mary Beth's skull. "No!" she shrieked. "I didn't do it!"

One side of Mary Beth's face was mashed in, so the eye on that side gawked up at the roof, accusingly. The eye was glazed over and dry, like a slaughtered pig's. "I didn't do it, Mary Beth," she cried. "I didn't do it." Mary Beth's dress wasn't even torn, not bloody.

Cindy felt sweat break out on her lip, on her stomach, behind her knees. She wiped her lip with a shaking hand. She whirled around, but there was nothing behind her. Still, she knew she had to get away. She turned toward Rough Creek Hollow, but she couldn't go back that way; it was still a wilderness. She heard mountain lions screaming, as they often heard them screaming in the night as the big cats traveled through the hollow and up the Wilderness Route. She jumped up and ran all the way around the house, looking for a place to hide.

Cindy fell on her knees beside Mary Beth again. "I'm sorry, Mary Beth. I'm sorry. I didn't know."

Cindy dropped the club. It fell against Mary Beth, who resounded with a hollow thump, like a drum. She stared, wide-eyed, at Mary Beth's belly and at her club. She could see herself, drumming in the night beside a bonfire, singing in screeches, while others danced in delighted frenzy. As if hypnotized, she picked up the cudgel and thumped Mary Beth twice, deliberately, listening for the tum-tum, then again and again, beginning to get a curious pleasure from the sound.

Cindy looked around. There was no one in sight, no one to see her.

Suppose she were Indian. What would that mean? Would she want to plunder through the settlements, stealing chickens and killing white people for their scalps? Would she want to howl and dance around a fire in the hollow, parading the bloody scalps at her belt? Would she love that?

Deliberately, she lay the root-ball of her club against Mary Beth's cracked skull. She rolled the club head into the wound on Mary Beth's head and gazed at it. It kind of fit. In another time and place, Cindy thought, she might be able to crack open a person's skull and beat out the brains. Maybe it would be easy; no more problem than killing a chicken. Just draw back your club and let fly. There might even be a satisfying crunch when the club-head went through the bone. Something demonic and terrible attracted her to the thought. Cindy raised her club into the air and tensed the muscles in her arm.

Mary Beth's gotched eye was staring directly at the club head. Cindy stopped. Mary Beth had caught her in a degenerate, depraved act. She shivered, for worms seemed to be crawling all over her arms, slimy and red, waving like hairs. Some were sliding down her arm, toward the club, as if wanting to help her lift it and swing it. She flung the club against the house, screaming, "I'm not an Indian!" Then she whimpered, "I'm not an Indian, Mary Beth."

Maybe it would be bullheaded and wanton of her to hide from the facts, but that would be better than feeling dirty and indecent. Maybe it was contrary of her, but that was better than being perverse. Cindy stood up and looked around—at the barn, the house, the trail to Rough Creek Hollow—as if she were recognizing for the first time where she was. She turned all the way around. She ran and grabbed her club, crusty and dirty as it was. Swinging around, she slung it as far into the pasture as she could. Then she ran after it and slung it again toward the hollow, shouting, "I'm not an Indian! I'm not an Indian! I'm never going to be an Indian!"

Coming back to the yard, she felt the tension drain from her body. She began to shake, like Della had when she barred the door. Now Cindy was scared, for herself, for Mary Beth, for the Johnsons, for her family. "Aaaaiiiieeee!" she began crying, screaming, wailing all at once. Gasping with sobs, she lay her head on Mary Beth's bloated chest, crying, "I'm sorry, Mary Beth"; sobbing, "I didn't know, honest"; whimpering, "I'm not even an Indian lover."

ROBERT FREEDMAN

## Colorado Ritual

The marmot sits whistling away,  
his old hide showing spots  
of wrinkled grey flesh,  
each whistle sending ripples  
through his loose brown frame.  
My head aches from the mountain height.  
The rolling hills back east,  
practical, lower to the ground, are adorned  
with green and brown--but often  
I had seen a scabby patch  
of what the hills were really like—  
full of ritual, Catholic hills,  
incense smell of musty wood  
and heat of hell in August.

There were times our  
ten-year old minds would guess  
at just how fast our legs  
would carry us if we would silently  
run past, accidentally  
brush our children's palms  
over the green skirts  
of those uniformed girls.  
They would walk each day  
from Little Flower or Most Precious Blood,  
and we picked the heavenliest ones  
and guessed what they had just confessed.

Levesque, Levesque,  
if you were with me now  
we'd sing some Latin praises  
to the Blessed Mother  
and watch the mysteries  
of undulating globes as mountain  
girls perform an offertory  
of which they're unaware,  
and we, old bow-legged French Canuck  
ridge walker, would listen  
to the birds chirping  
confiteor, confiteor.



T. ALAN BROUGHTON

## A Prayer

Before the sun had stripped the sky  
of stars, he was hauled from boards  
where he lay, the shovel thrust  
in his hands. But he rarely slept,  
clutching himself with arms  
that ached from holes  
he'd dug the day before.

Out to the fields to extend  
the pit where trucks  
will dump their cargoes,  
bodies simplified to skin  
yanked tight on bone.  
Toss them in, layer on layer  
until they rise to the brim,  
then shovel again. Day after day,  
in snow and rain, in gauzy sun  
of spring, he must dispose  
of what their owners cannot use—  
a hand that spanned an octave,  
feet that balanced on a rung,  
lips that never chose such rictus.

After the gates fell down  
he was told, You're free —  
to walk the skift of soil  
or pass through cities thronged  
with shadowy generations.  
He lives on the far side  
of nightmare, recalling the ones  
who might have been.

If he wakes on a dappled beach  
where a child is humming as he sifts,  
may he let that moment's joy  
burn years of doubt.  
Listen, listen  
to water over rock,  
bird high on its branch,  
and boy's unconscious voice—  
they shall not win,  
those ones who hate.



## Book Marks

John Rodden

### *The Politics of Literary Reputation: the Making and Claiming of "St. George" Orwell*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, 479 pp. \$27.50

Reviewed by  
MARTIN GREEN

On the cover of this book is a famous photograph of Orwell, his face frozen in dismay as he becomes aware of a camera pointed at him. Like most of his photographs, it suggests a man backing away in instinctive self-concealment. And the contrast between that and his essays, so full of self-declaration and self-affirmation, is a paradox manifested in many dimensions. This plain man, this truth-teller, was always changing his name or his opinions or his class—in his novels—his self image.

In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* he portrayed himself as Gordon Comstock, poet and sensitive young man. But in *Coming Up For Air*, Orwell (as fed up as his readers with Gordon) saw and spoke through the opposite persona of George Bowling, a tubby vulgarian. Bowling, moreover, was a renaming of Flaxman, a minor character in the earlier novel.

Such self-concealing is what novelists do. In her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, Virginia Woolf presented herself as Rachel, who met a minor character called Mrs. Dalloway. The latter was a bird-brained London hostess, as remote from Rachel as Flaxman is from Gordon. But in her more famous later novel, Woolf saw and spoke through Mrs. Dalloway. Closer to Orwell's case is James Joyce's; in *Ulysses* he turned away from his sensitive young hero, Stephen Dedalus, to see and speak through a tubby vulgarian, Leopold Bloom. The search for identity changes into a flight from identity; which is not surprising in "artists" like Woolf and Joyce, but is a bit disconcerting in "St. George" Orwell.

Moreover, when we do locate a persistent identity, it is likely to be disconcerting in another way. Rodden points to some interesting likenesses between Orwell and Kipling as writers—likenesses in their extraordinary effectiveness. Both created phrases which entered the general language; both had an audience which exceeded the literary one; both are encountered by a reader at several different phases of his education in the form of different books—*Animal Farm* as a child, 1984 in high school, the essays in college. The impact of that personality is driven home by these repeated encounters. Orwell himself commented on all these features of Kipling's career and reputation.

Following up Rodden's observations, I then reflected on a temperamental likeness between the two men. In their



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first novels, Kipling's *The Light That Failed* and Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, the autobiographical hero arrives in England with no money. He has only to ask friends for a loan, but he prefers to make do—to survive in poverty for a fixed period. The experience is grim, exhausting rather than exhilarating, but it feeds his pride, his anger at society, and his imaginative power; the young man becomes Kipling, or Orwell, by enduring this ordeal. That act of self-mastery and self-making clearly relates to certain key values of realism, responsibility, and masculinism, which we find both writers affirming.

Orwell of course openly admired Kipling; and even more despised the despisers of Kipling. But it is nevertheless disconcerting to think of how much the two had in common—to think Orwell may have been one of the hidden routes by which Kipling's influence has reached later generations of English writers, despite official disapproval. John Rodden has provided a major resource to those of us who brood over these paradoxes.

His book on Orwell's reputation has come out to great and well-deserved applause. Perhaps, since it is an unusual kind of book, it behooves me to give a brief description. Of its six chapters, four deal each with one major image of Orwell: the Rebel, the Common Man, the Prophet, and the Saint. But each of those chapters is divided again into four or five sections, each of which is devoted to one reader-group's treatment of that idea. Thus Orwell has

been treated as being (or pretending to be) the Common Man by the British Marxists, but also by spokesmen for the Soviet Union, and by Feminists. Each group has its own axe to grind, its own "take" on that image, and in the cases mentioned it is an unfavorable take. Thus the account of the first group's idea is entitled "An Ex-Socialist"; the second, the Soviet view, is entitled "Enemy of Mankind?"; and the feminists' view is "A Sexist After All?"

What I give there is a simplified as well as abbreviated account of Rodden's Chapter 4. If you can extend your mind to imagine four such chapters, and two more of narrative and theory—for instance, fifty pages of the theory of literary reputation—you will see how complex an argument it is, and how strenuous a read.

The first thing to say is that this analytic complexity and substantive detail is justified. They are rooted in the subject itself, and Rodden's conceptual elaboration and presentational subdivisions are necessary for us to grasp that subject and see all around it. Orwell's books and his personality have been cherished, cursed, and simply interpreted, in manifold ways. Much of the intellectual history of this century's second half is reflected in those interpretations, their dialectical sequence and mutual contradiction.

Literary reputation, moreover, though at the heart of the whole phenomenon of literature, is still a dark continent of the mind. We have not agreed on how to measure it or how to combine it with





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value judgments, or how to take it seriously. We have not known what to call relevant data, how to collect such data, or how to interpret it.

We can now expect that Rodden's example will inspire other scholars to do similar studies of other authors. But they may find that he, like other precursors, has laid a curse on his followers, by preempting the best of such subjects, so that it will be hard for them to save their work from looking pale by comparison.

However, the book is hard to read. Perhaps one should say it must be read in two ways. It is first of all an archive, keyed by an index, in which you can look up the names of whoever or whatever interests you, to see what links there were between that topic and Orwell—while you ignore the context Rodden gives that information.

Then, secondly, it is an argument, whose parts must be read in the sequence in which they are presented. Most readers, I suggest, should use both methods, and in that order. They should exhaust their "topical" or "factual" curiosity—in a sense sate their interest in Orwell—first. Because when they begin to read the book in the second way, as an argument, its interest derives from the way Orwell is reflected in other people and events, and even more from what Rodden makes of his complex subject.

To follow that argument you have to bracket off much of the substance—of

Orwell—and ignore the quotations, the allusions, the literal parentheses, which open up interesting perspectives in every direction.

What I have said is true of most good academic books, and Rodden's is academic, in the honorable senses, of being thorough, painstaking, objective and inclusive. However, I myself hope that in his next book, which I already look forward to, he will alter the balance of his priorities, and give us an easier read. I think that is what Orwell would have said.





## Contributors

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